

THE RAJAH'S RACER

BY
NAT GOULD



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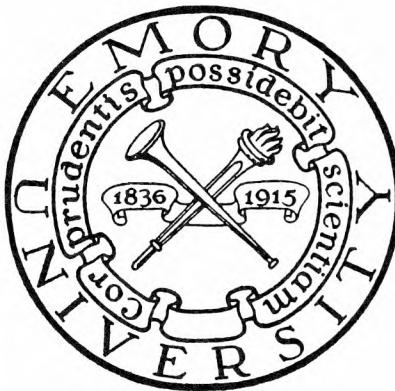
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THE RAJAH'S RACER

CHAPTER I

THE MANNER OF MAN

THE natives classed him as a burra sahib, a gentleman of some position. What he really was, he alone knew. He had been in India many years, working hard by fits and starts, idling for long periods, leading a lonely isolated life for months, then suddenly plunging, with a whirl of excitement, in one of the big cities. A strange man with few friends, and none of them women ; a lover of animals ; a splendid keen sportsman, fearless, crafty, cunning in such pursuits, whether in the jungle or the open. His jamadar—manager—Abdool Chunder, was devoted to him : in his eyes he was a god to be worshipped and at times feared.

India was his home. He loved it ; was fascinated by its many mysteries and enchantments, which harmonised with his temperament. A strange man, hardly understandable to his English acquaintances ; better known by the natives living around him, who trusted him and obeyed.

He commanded obedience, and would have made a good soldier ; an old Indian officer had said,

“ With a hundred men like that I would conquer a nation ; ” and he meant what he said.

“ What is he ? Who is he ? ” the questions were often asked, over and over again, and remained unanswered, save as regards his occupation and mode of life.

Ostensibly he was a planter, but carried on his business in a lazy kind of way, caring not whether he made much or little out of his indigo, and yet prospering to all outward seeming. His coolies sometimes cheated him, entering their names on the roll, and then absenting themselves until paytime came round. When they were found out they remembered. He taught them a lesson in his own way and they seldom forgot it. His store of bits of copper coin, over sixty to the rupee, was apparently inexhaustible, and he doled it out with a liberal hand when it suited him.

The coolies hated the jamadar, who only did his duty by the sahib, but they had no evil word for the planter. The boys and girls with their merry chubby faces and fat paunches gathered round him in crowds and hailed his approach with joy. Children are good judges ; even the little dark outcasts of India. To these dusky imps the sahib was a sort of Indian Father Christmas, and the jamadar said he killed them with kindness ; utterly ruined them and encouraged insubordination. He did not say it in these words, but that was what he meant. The women looked slyly at him, throwing coquettish glances, of which he took no notice. They were for the most part dressed in large earrings, heavy brass arm rings, with long chains of bright coloured beads round their necks, and very little else.

The planter took an interest in his coolies ; they had decent huts, and when the blazing hot sun poured down upon them they were happy and crooned to themselves at their work ; when the cold nights came on he saw they had covering for their shrivelled up skins.

The jamadar abused the coolies in choicest Hindoo, cursing their ancestors back through many generations, with particular stress laid upon their great grandfathers and grandmothers, for begetting their parents ; but the planter seldom swore. When necessary, he used his arms.

The planter's house, a bungalow, was a large roomy structure, built on the ground floor with a spacious verandah, supported on pillars round three sides. It contained six or seven fair sized rooms, besides the kitchens and outhouses at the rear. The roof sloped almost from a point in the centre down each of the four sides, gradually widening until it reached the edge of the verandah. The bungalow was admirably adapted to the climate, the rooms being habitable in summer, and easily warmed in the cool weather. The stables were extensive, ranging down the whole of one side of the compound, in which the bungalow stood. Sloping down from the front verandah towards the river, which gleamed and glistened in the distance, shimmering like a shaken garment of silver tinsel, was a garden well kept and tended, terraced, and planned skilfully. The bullock house was handy, and not far distant could be seen the various houses, vats, buildings, and workshops where the indigo went through sundry processes. Far away in the distance was the towering mountain range, from whence the melting snows sometimes

came down to swell the waters of the river, which from a placid stream became a foaming roaring torrent. From these snow-capped mountains, upon which the Indian sun shone with dazzling splendour, a cool breeze often scoured over the grass and jungle, entered the bungalow, leaving a sweet pure scent behind as it passed through. It was an ideal Indian planter's home, and known throughout many parts of Northern India as "Evermore." A strange name—like its owner, mysterious. There was always a welcome for visitors at Evermore, and if the owner was absent there was never any hesitation in raiding his larder and making one's self comfortable until he returned. The name of the owner of Evermore bungalow was Raja Ranji, and to his friends he was known as Raja; to his natives as Ranji Sahib. Many people were certain this was not his real name. He was an Englishman, they vowed; and yet his dark complexion almost proclaimed him a native of the land. Real name or not, he was never spoken of as other than Raja Ranji, and he was not a man to brook prying into his affairs, or to be questioned out of idle curiosity.

Raja Ranji owned Evermore, and the lands adjoining it; surrounding it on all sides. What he did not own he rented from the Rajah of Shirazi, with whom he was on terms of friendship. For many miles Raja Ranji could ride without leaving his own ground, which included grass lands, jungle, farm lands, where indigo, maize, sugar cane and a variety of grain and vegetables were grown. A wealthy baboo owned the land extending beyond Evermore, and here Raja was as much at home as on his own domain. Altogether, he had free rights over an

enormous tract of country, and his face was familiar in many scattered villages, nestling beneath the shade of the plantain and mango groves. In many of these villages he acted as administrator of justice, dealing it out as he thought right, avoiding the cumbersome law, and relying upon his common sense and knowledge of the native character. His decisions were received with respect and seldom failed to give satisfaction. He farmed many of these villages ; that is, he let the ryots have their land in return for preparing certain fields for the indigo crop, making advances to them on account so that they were enabled to buy seeds for their own ground. Sometimes he had trouble with these men, but his masterful way of dealing with them gave him the upper hand.

It was after eight o'clock, and Raja Ranji having finished his dinner was enjoying a cigar, seated in an easy lounging chair on the verandah. The night was very still ; there was no breeze, and it had been a blazing hot day. The planter wore a cool, comfortable costume, resembling a pyjama suit, the jacket of which was thrown open. He was quite alone, no new experience for him. From the rear of the bungalow came a faint echo of the clatter of pots and pans, mingling with the incessant chattering of the servants. An occasional bark from the kennels sounded strangely loud, and from the garden arose a peculiar humming sound like the gradual simmering down of boiling water in a kettle. He loved these dreamy nights, and solitude was the companion he most favoured. Close to him, on the verandah, lay a big wolfhound, and on the other side of his chair a terrier played with a kitten. He watched their

gambols, smiling at their antics, wondering how long the peace would continue between them. He had been idling around most of the day, in the cooler hours, riding amongst the familiar scenes, observant of everything, even when apparently absorbed with his thoughts. It was always so with him, and his shekarry said he had eyes in the back of his head.

He watched the smoke of his cigar curling in fantastic shapes in the air ; he thoroughly enjoyed tobacco : it soothed him, brought with it pleasant thoughts to keep him company. He seldom drank ; liquor was not good for him. Strong man that he was, it had mastered him more than once, and he vowed it should never again gain a victory over him.

There was a light footfall, and a figure came round the corner of the bungalow.

He closed his eyes, remaining perfectly still ; he knew who it was coming towards him.

A young girl dressed in the native costume, with rings in her ears, and a flowing robe through which her limbs could be seen as she moved, her arms naked, and her hair uncoiled, crept into the verandah, and paused listening. The terrier sniffed, then wagged his tail in welcome ; the big hound winked his eyes, as his head lay between his paws ; the kitten darted inside after a parting scratch at his playmate.

The light from the lamp shone through the window into the verandah, and cast a glow on Raja's figure in the chair. Noiselessly the girl came towards him, and as she stepped into the light it shone upon her glistening earrings and played about her bronze coloured arms and soft silky covering. It illuminated her face, a beautiful bewitching face, strangely

contrasting with the other women about Evermore, whose countenances were as a rule plain even to coarseness. She had dark lustrous eyes, the lids drooping well over, eyebrows black and somewhat thick, her lashes long. Her features were irritatingly irregular, giving her face a strange charm. Her lips were somewhat thick, her nose slightly prominent, her cheeks smooth and well rounded. She was not quite the average height, slim and graceful, her bosom full and high set.

Bending over Raja she peered into his face, then she sat down at his feet, waiting patiently, looking up at him.

He watched her out of the corner of his eye, and presently placed his hand on her head. A shiver of pleasure ran through her frame as she nestled against his outstretched leg. He stroked her hair tenderly for some minutes in silence, then he said, in a deep, low, yet not unmusical voice,

“Krishna, you ought not to be here.”

She put her hands on him, and looking up, said, “It is good to be here.”

“If your father comes he will be angry.”

“He will not come ; he is away He has gone to the temple of Shiva.”

Raja muttered something savagely under his breath.

“To see Paroes the Brahmin ? ”

“It is so ; to see Paroes the Brahmin,” she replied.

“Curse him. May his gods shatter him,” said Raja.

She shuddered and clasped his hand.

“Paroes is powerful. His god is destruction—the terrible Shiva—the all-powerful, the supreme.”

"Poor little Krishna," he said, kindly, slowing down his temper. "Does your father fear him—this Brahmin?"

"He believes; he worships at the temple of Shiva."

"And Paroës bids him do his will," said Raja.

"It is so, Sahib."

"And what is his will, Krishna?"

Again the shudder passed through the girl's body

"I am his will," she said in a low voice.

"Thou!" he exclaimed. Then rousing himself, he sat up and said—

"It is monstrous; it shall not be. Abdool is mad. Give his daughter to a priest of Shiva, a degraded beast like Paroës. By heaven, it shall never be."

"There is this," she said, and something glittered in the light.

"For him or for thee?" he asked.

"For both!" she answered.

"Krishna, you must be brave. I will speak to your father."

"It is not safe; he will know I have been here."

"He shall not know. I will find some way to speak to him. If there is danger, come here. Paroës cannot, dare not, enter here."

"He is young and strong, and a priest of Shiva," she said.

Raja laughed. He cared but little for Shiva and all his worshippers.

"I am strong also," he said

She smiled; it was a self-evident fact.

"I will thrash Paroës the Brahmin," he said. .

Her face denoted that such a proceeding would give her satisfaction; but she tried to dissuade him.

He took her in his arms and said softly—

“ Little daughter, the Brahmin shall do you no harm.”

“ You are as a father to me,” she said.

“ That is so. Abdool is thy father, too ; you are quite safe.”

She thanked him, and glided swiftly away, never looking behind.

“ Poor, pretty little Krishna,” he said to himself. “ Abdool is an old fool. Give his daughter to that beast of a priest ! Not if I know it. Shiva may be the god of destruction. If so, he shall start at Paroies. Wait until Abdool comes round ; he’ll get into trouble with me if he doesn’t look out. I wonder if Krishna is his child. She’s not a bit like the ugly old beggar. One thing is certain, if he is incapable of taking care of her I am not, and that unholy Brahmin will have to reckon with me if he dares lay a hand upon her.”

CHAPTER II

SHIVA'S TEMPLE

ABDOOL CHUNDER walked noiselessly along under the outspreading trees, picking his way carefully, seeing in the dim light better than many people not of his race would have done in broad daylight. A tall, thin man, Abdool, with a well dried skin, and an inscrutable face. Strong and active, wiry, a rough man to handle in a struggle when the passion was in him. He had been jamadar at Evermore for a long time, and got on well with Raja Ranji. They understood each other, and the Sahib seldom raged at him, being too indolent and easy going: so thought Abdool.

There was a strong sickly scent in the air from the mhowa flower; it would have been nauseous to a European, but Abdool sniffed it with satisfaction. The tall feathery looking trees around and towering above him were hill sirres, and there was no breeze to stir their acacia-like leaves. Bright crimson flowers burst forth from the parass trees, which, when in full bloom, are a wondrous sight. He heeded none of these things, for he was hastening to the temple of Shiva to see Paroës the Brahmin.

On his way he passed a small shrine almost hidden amidst a mass of dense growth; it was sacred to the goddess who protects the herds and the flocks, and those who tend them, and he stopped before it for a moment, making curious signs.

Shiva's temple was some considerable distance from his small habitation, but he was accustomed to long journeys on foot, and seldom wearied. He went at a jog trot, his loose loin cloth hampering him not at all. He was almost naked. When not on duty at Evermore he discarded all superfluous clothing. His bare arms were long and sinewy, and his fingers stretched out like talons ; he swung them backwards and forwards as he moved.

At the end of the path he followed was a high mound, and on it stood the temple. He saw it faintly outlined, and slackened his speed, a look of fear coming into his face.

The Hindoo temple was built almost in the shape of a mosque of an unpretentious kind. It had three minarets over the front, and a dome in the centre. The doorway appeared to have been cut out of the solid building ; it was narrow, tall, pointed at the top. Huge trees overshadowed the place, and there was a cavern close beside it, going far into the rock. A small lake was near at hand, on the borders of which were large mango trees, and on its surface many hued water plants.

Abdool stopped, listening. The silence was profound ; Shiva's temple rested in a peaceful spot.

Cautiously pushing open the curiously made wooden gate he entered the small enclosure in which the temple stood. He approached the door timidly, and when he reached it, paused ; then bracing himself, he pushed it slightly open, peering in. At the end of the temple sat enthroned a hideous black idol, half man, half woman, with five heads, and a glaring eye in the centre head's forehead, which seemed to pierce him through as he looked at it, with

a shiver. On either side of the great idol were two smaller figures, and in front of each of these was a white bull hewn out of stone. A necklace of skulls hung suspended from the chief god's waist, and a serpent was coiled about his neck. A deer skin and a tiger skin were spread out in front of him, and on these were placed kneeling stools. On either side of the temple were figures of demons, whose grinning heads were terrible to look upon. There were no signs of wealth in Shiva's temple ; the offerings of the worshippers were well taken care of by the priest. A light was burning close to the idol, and shed a faint glimmer on the glistening black figure.

Abdool walked down the centre of the temple, crossed to the left, then to the right, and eventually signing himself, bowed down in front of the idol. A low murmuring sound commenced to echo through the temple, and the large eye of Shiva flashed fire.

As Abdool prostrated himself the eyes of Paroës were fixed upon him from his place of concealment behind the god. There was an unholy light in them, keen, penetrating, and the face of the priest worked strangely, his mouth twitching, and his nostrils extending.

He came forward and stood behind Abdool, who heard him not. Paroës the Brahmin was a man of medium height, well formed, and strongly built. His skin was a pale golden olive, and he was almost as light in colour as Raja Ranji. The weather being hot, he wore a loin cloth only, which hung below his knees in graceful folds. Round his neck, thrown over the shoulder, was the sacred thread of his Order. His face was intelligent, but the sensual look in it spoiled him ; he was dreaded by the women who

had female children : they shuddered at his approach.

For some minutes he stood over Abdool, then he touched him on the shoulder, and he rose with a sharp spring, uttering a cry of fear.

Paroës smiled wickedly, and beckoned him to follow. They went into a small room at the rear of the idol. On the floor were carpets soft to the tread, and gaudy cushions, also a table of Indian workmanship, and writing materials.

“ You have come alone,” said Paroës.

Abdool signified that such was the case.

“ How long must I wait ? ” asked Paroës.

“ Will nothing less suffice ? ”

“ Nothing ! ”

Abdool wrung his hands, and his face betrayed his anguish.

“ To the priest of Shiva no offering can be too great.”

“ I will give you much ; but this I cannot do.”

Paroës’ eyes gleamed, and a hissing sound came from the mouth of the idol.

“ Look,” said the Brahmin, pointing to the black monster.

Abdool started back in horror. The idol’s eye was red and glowing, his tongue protruded, and steam came out of his great mouth. The unfortunate man trembled in every limb, and sank on to his knees helplessly, his head bowed before the angry spirit, as he thought, waking within the god.

“ Beware the wrath of Shiva,” said Paroës.

Abdool clutched the priest’s loin cloth, and said piteously—

“ She is thine. I offer her to the god through thee, the holy priest of Shiva.”

At once the sound ceased, and the idol resumed its normal look.

"See, you have done well," said Paroes, and Abdool gave a sigh of relief. The least he had expected was to be smitten down where he stood.

The Brahmin was clever. He had seen life in Calcutta until for reasons best known to himself he had left the city and hidden himself in this village temple. He was educated; had a knowledge of Europeans and their manners, all of which assisted him to terrorise the natives, and even work his will upon such men as the jamadar of Evermore. What he knew made him doubly dangerous, and his inventions in connection with the idol assisted him materially. Many of the ideas connected with his religion were of great beauty, but strangely mingled with voluptuous thoughts, and every manner of self-indulgence.

Paroes saw Krishna and coveted her. To him she was the one desirable thing to possess. Her beauty attracted him, and he set to work to obtain his desire. To the girl herself he had seldom spoken. Two or three times she had come to the temple with Abdool, but something in his look frightened her, and she remained away. He worked upon the father, first by teaching him things that had hitherto been hidden from him, and subtly winning him to himself, giving him to understand the blessings he could bestow upon him in this world, and in the next.

Gradually he accustomed Abdool to regard the surrender of Krishna to himself as a devout act, telling him that through him the girl would be honoured by being given to the god. What more

could be desired for her ; it was a fate the proudest woman in all India might envy.

Abdool considered the matter : he even mentioned it to Krishna in glowing terms, but the girl recoiled from the proposal with such horror that his purpose wavered. Krishna was the light of his eyes. She was beautiful, and he was proud of her. If she subjected herself to Paroes she might become a goddess, and in his flight of imagination he hardly dared think what honours were in store for her. He spoke to her again, and this time she blazed forth in anger, and cursed Shiva, Paroes, and all his gods, until Abdool's teeth chattered for very fear of what might befall her.

He placed the whole matter before Paroes, who at first used mild persuasion, of which he soon tired ; then he tried threats, and eventually worked upon his superstitions.

He hated the girl because she despised and rejected him, and his hate fanned his love into a red hot flame. Krishna must be his ; he vowed it before his god.

All the surroundings of the temple of Shiva were calculated to impress such a man as Abdool. The Brahmin talked to him in the sacred building, reasoning with him, pointing out his duty, showing him the way to eternal happiness.

The last time he left Paroes, Abdool had returned home with his mind fully made up, and hot from the weird scene he spoke out to Krishna. He succeeded in frightening the girl, and she fled to Raja Ranji for comfort and protection. The Sahib was mighty and powerful, a real burra sahib, and in him was hope. He had often seen Krishna and admired her ; she

was so different to the other women. When she hinted at her fears he flew into a towering rage, and she ran away from him terrified. Never before had she seen the quiet Sahib in such a mood ; it was new to her, and she had caused it.

But she came again and again, unknown to Abdool, and when he was with Paroës she once more crept to Raja Ranji's side.

When Abdool left the temple Paroës said—

“ Be cunning ; do not frighten her. I will give you time, but she must come to me before many weeks are past. There is a great honour in store for her, and much joy for you.”

“ She shall be persuaded,” said Abdool, as he thought of the angry god inside.

Abdool hastened home, from time to time glancing fearfully behind, expecting something, he knew not what, to happen. His interview with the priest had subdued him. He was conquered. He reasoned with himself that the fate in store for Krishna was a holy one, and that she would reap everlasting benefit thereby. He had seen the wrath of the god, and how it was appeased, and knew from this what Paroës demanded was right.

The wily Brahmin anticipated this frame of mind in him, and knew it would work best for his ends.

Krishna reached her home before him, and when he entered she saw from his face something unusual had happened.

Abdool, however, bore in mind what Paroës said, and determined to say nothing at present. He had been given a few weeks, and in that time he might devise some means of overcoming her objection.

Krishna wondered at his silence, and curiosity

prompted her to find out what had happened at the temple. Her efforts were unavailing. Abdool kept silent, and bid her hold her tongue. What was the meaning of it? Had he defied Paroes, dared him to do his worst?

She slept well that night, thinking something had happened in her favour. The figure of the priest rose before her mind, and she contrasted him with the Sahib.

Krishna was young, and in India youth develops quickly into womanhood. She had Raja Ranji for a second father, but that was not how she thought of him. Had her father come to her with a proposal to hand her over to Raja Ranji she would have gone willingly to his bungalow, waited upon him with joy in everything, worshipped him, and made him her all. She would have seen nothing wrong in being the constant companion of Raja. Was not her father his jamadar? then why should she not be his hand-maiden, and wait upon his every want? If her father managed out of doors, there was no obstacle to her doing the same inside, if the Sahib so willed.

Krishna was unlike all the native women at Evermore, and she was aware of it. Sometimes she wondered why it was so, but she was very glad to have been cast in a different mould. Her intelligence was much quicker and keener than theirs, her mode of speech was different. They knew and recognised it. The jamadar's daughter was regarded with respect, and she accepted their acknowledgment of her superiority as her right. The women of the villages saw what Krishna did not see. They recognised her as the favourite of the Sahib, and knew that meant the power, if she had the will, to work them good or ill.

CHAPTER III

THE PLANTER'S HOME

ABDOOL was making his report to Raja ; he had several complaints, and rejoiced in them, prolonging his statement, giving minute particulars of everything ; time was no object to him, nor did it appear to be so to his listener. His voice was not unpleasant —the low, monotonous tone in which he spoke was soothing. Sometimes it irritated Raja, exasperated him ; but to-day he was in a patient mood. There had been a row in one of the villages : blows had been struck, and one woman was bewitched. It arose from a simple cause, the purloining of poultry. The ryot is a born thief. The thief had been discovered, the fowl had been tampered with, and the wife of the stealer had fallen ill. It was the jamadar's opinion that the original owner of the fowl deserved punishment for bewitching the wife of the thief.

Raja saw the matter in a different light, and was of opinion the thief deserved all the trouble that had overtaken him ; he had no right to steal the fowl.

“ But she is bewitched by him,” said Abdool ; “ the theft is nothing to that.”

Raja promised to adjudicate upon the matter, and Abdool proceeded with his complaint about the laziness of the coolies, who shirked their work, and drew their pay.

" Point the men out to me when they come for their coppers to-night," said Raja. Then he asked carelessly—

" Where were you going last night ? You were out late."

" The Sahib saw me !" exclaimed Abdool astonished.

Raja nodded, waiting for an answer.

" I went to the temple," said Abdool, who thought it best to speak the truth, although he had no liking for the turn the conversation had taken.

" You are a pious man, but why go at night ? "

" When the work is done is the time for prayer."

" An excellent precept," laughed Raja, " but you do not always carry it out. Your piety has increased of late, you make many visits to Shiva's temple."

Abdool was aware the Sahib disliked priests.

" Does the Sahib prevent me going ? " said Abdool.

" I have not prevented you, but I think Paroës is a bad man ; he is a wicked priest. The women fear him, is it not so ? "

" They are fools and do not understand. Paroës is a holy man."

" Is he ? " said Raja. " He's a devil."

Abdool held up his hands in horror as he said—

" He is a priest ; he is no devil."

" He's both," replied Raja. " If he interferes with any of my people I'll thrash him. You can tell him so next time you see him."

Abdool shook his head mournfully ; he wondered what vengeance would follow upon the outrage.

" Also tell him I wish to know why he left Calcutta. If he annoys me, I shall find out."

" Calcutta ! Was he there ? " asked Abdool.

"He was, and left in a hurry, no doubt," replied Raja. "Trust him not, Abdool."

The jamadar was departing, when Raja said—

"Come here, I have something more to say."

Abdool returned, and stood before him.

"Krishna is old enough to work," he said. "She can come here ; she will be useful."

This was a blow for Abdool. If Krishna came to the bungalow to work for the Sahib, there was small chance of his being able to carry out Paroës' wishes.

"She is my only one ; I shall be alone," said Abdool.

"You do not wish her to come here ; do you think I would harm her ? "

"It is not that ; the Sahib would not hurt her, but she has been with me always, I cannot let her go."

"She is beautiful, it is not safe to leave her alone all day while you are here."

"No one dare harm her."

"Then you will not let her come ? "

"If the Sahib wills, it must be so," replied Abdool ; "but let her remain with me."

"I will think it over. If I require her she must come," said Raja, and dismissed him.

"Krishna is right," muttered Raja. "Abdool is in the power of that cursed priest, and dare not permit her to come here. We shall see, Paroës, holy man, who is the stronger, you or I." And he clenched his fist in a way that boded ill for the Brahmin.

Abdool walked away in a perturbed state of mind. This move on the Sahib's part boded ill for him. He knew what a determined man he had to deal with,

and if he wanted Krishna at the bungalow she would have to come. Matters were likely to be very unpleasant for Abdool. It comforted him when he thought if Krishna was at Evermore she would be safe from Paroës, and the priest could not blame him for obeying the command of the Sahib.

Abdool passed across the compound to the stables, where the men were grooming the horses. Most of them were natives of the district, but there were four or five boys who had been brought from racing stables, and they were the plague of the jamadar's existence. They were mischievous, and their monkey tricks caused Abdool much anxiety.

Raja Ranji had a fine lot of horses, and amongst them several racers. He was fond of racing, and had ample space at his disposal for training. The grass land at Evermore was well suited to the purpose, and on more than one occasion his horses had been successful in big events. He also had polo and racing ponies, and made more money out of them than he did over his planting operations.

Abdool was in a bad temper, and his words fell fast as he showered abusive epithets upon the workers. It relieved his feelings to find fault with everything, but very little notice was taken of his outburst. The lads whistled and made faces at him, well knowing he dare not use his stick, for fear of frightening the horses. He promised what he would do when they came outside ; his words were greeted with a volley of chaff, and he left them in a rage.

It was very different when Raja Ranji came round to the stables. He examined the horses carefully, and there was no escaping punishment for the boy who neglected his duty. The Evermore horses were

always in good condition, and Raja's visitors always reckoned upon having a good mount provided for them. The estate was situated in the very heart of a great sporting country in Northern Bengal. There was dense, almost impenetrable jungle, wide open grass lands, rice fields, indigo fields, land planted with corn of various kinds, the whole being well watered. No lack of amusement could be complained of here. The neighbouring planters, the managers of the numerous estates, officers of the Indian Army, were always sure of a welcome from Raja, who roused himself to find sport for them, and took pleasure in showing them his horses. He made few firm friends, but despite his reserved nature, he was well liked, if hardly understood. Occasionally, a party, accompanied by ladies, arrived, and then there was much stir in the household. Raja attracted the women, probably because he appeared indifferent to their attentions. He piqued their curiosity ; his demeanour was accepted as a challenge, and they tried to subdue him by being particularly amiable. The men wondered at him. Young susceptible officers were astonished at him ; they would have acted far otherwise if challenged by bright eyes and pretty faces to a flirtation. They were, however, drawn to him, and liked him. He never interfered in any way with their comings and goings. At Evermore they did exactly as they wished. When ladies arrived he welcomed them courteously, treated them all alike, showing no preference for anyone in particular.

There had been no visitors at Evermore for some weeks, but he thought nothing of it. He had his amusements, and his work, when he chose to do it,

and that sufficed. He read a good deal, and the books he selected would have astonished some of his visitors. He was well versed in the history of the country he lived in, ancient and modern. Eastern and Oriental tales were particularly attractive to him. He studied the Bible and the Koran, and compared them, finding much in each to convince him of great truths. Poetry he read frequently, understood it, fully comprehended the fantastic flights of the imagination of genius. He sometimes astonished his companions by quoting a long passage from one of his favourites. His books were the solace of his quiet hours, and he read and handled them lovingly. He seldom returned from Calcutta without some additions to his literary treasures, and he was like a child with a new toy when he secured something he really liked.

A graceful grey Arab stallion attracted his notice as he walked behind the horses. He stepped up to it, stroked its beautiful silky coat, and patted the arched neck. Gazelle was well named, if only for his eyes, which were large, liquid, full of depth and meaning. The Arab was a favourite with the Sahib, and the lads knew it. They watched him as he passed his hands over the horse, feeling his condition, summing up his health, knowing what would happen if he found anything wrong. Apparently he was satisfied, but he remained looking at the horse when he finished his examination. Gazelle was worth looking at. He was not over fourteen hands, but he carried Raja well, and many a stiff ride had they had together. A peculiar tempered horse, hard to manage, totally uncontrollable by a stranger, yet he would follow his master about like a dog, and

neighed with pleasure at his approach. Fleet of foot, untiring, Gazelle was capable of an extraordinary amount of work. There were several Arabs in the stable, but he was the king of them all.

He passed on, and Gazelle followed his movements with wistful eyes ; the lads were glad the inspection proved satisfactory. More than one of them had felt the Arab's teeth in some part of his body, and Gazelle was the best abused horse in the stables.

The thoroughbreds were kept apart at the far end of the long range of stabling. Not more than a month ago he had sold four of his best blood horses to the Rajah, who was delighted at obtaining them with so little trouble. The price paid was heavy, but the Rajah of Shirazi was possessed of fabulous wealth, and dealt out rupees with a liberal hand. Raja had named his price, and the amount was paid. He had no particular wish to part with these horses, and named a price that he fancied was prohibitive. The Rajah, however, had no notion of prohibitive prices, he wanted the horses, and he took them at his friend's valuation. One horse, named Akbar, a four year old bay, Raja was sorry to lose, but he consoled himself with the thought that he was in the possession of the Rajah. Akbar had won a couple of races at the holiday gathering at Sumpore, where the Rajah had first seen him and coveted him. Being accustomed to having his desires fulfilled, he had sent a messenger to Raja, asking if he had any thoroughbreds for sale. On receiving a reply in the affirmative, he had ridden to Evermore, and the result of his visit was the purchase of Akbar and three others. The Rajah made no secret of his

ambition to win the Viceroy's Cup, and he thought Akbar equal to the task.

Raja was dubious ; the Cup, he was well aware, was not easily won ; he had tried to capture it more than once, and failed. Akbar was a good horse, but not equal to such a task.

The Rajah having expressed the opinion that Akbar would win the Viceroy's Cup, he stuck to it, and offered to bet Raja any reasonable amount on the event, which he declined to entertain. The purchaser left perfectly satisfied in his own mind that Raja was afraid to wager because he agreed with him.

He still had five thoroughbreds in training, and meant to purchase more, when he heard of a shipment arriving from Australia. He was partial to Walers, and knew they were generally to be relied upon. More than once he had promised himself a long holiday, and a voyage to Sydney, but it had not come off yet. He saw no reason why he should not combine business with pleasure, and purchase a number of horses in the Colonies for the Indian market. He knew the sort required, and that he would have no difficulty in finding customers for any he did not wish to keep. He could not make up his mind to leave Evermore, however. He was much attached to the lonely place ; it suited him admirably and he had been there nearly twenty years.

Sometimes, when he looked back over that span of life he hardly realised that such a lapse of time had passed by so lightly and quickly. He was young when he left England, but he had suffered, and there was no love left in his heart for the land of his birth. He never spoke of those early days ; but they were

not blotted out. He started life again when he landed in India, and set himself to cultivate entirely different thoughts, to harmonise his mind to the country ; to think as Easterns thought, and to that end he studied their languages, read their literature, entered into their superstitions and beliefs, became as one of them in many things, and eventually understood them, as few men can. Despite all this, he often found himself thinking of the past, and what might have been, although it did not trouble his contentment with the present and the life he had chosen to live.

CHAPTER IV

PRIEST OR PLANTER

THE ryots and Dangurs were hard at work in the fields cutting out the indigo stubble, their wives and children gathering the stock for fuel. It was early morning, and the air was cool ; before mid-day the sun would be hot, and they would leave off work. There were four hundred of them or thereabouts, besides women and children, and a screaming, chattering crowd they were, swarming like big black ants over the land. They shuffled along, raising clouds of white dust as they cleared the ground ; later on the native harrow, a big log of wood, would be brought out to break up the soil, pulverise it, and get it into condition for sowing. The Dangurs worked the best, and beguiled the time humming native songs, cracking jokes, and screeching with laughter at their own witticisms. The jamadar was there, with his head men under him, assisting him to keep the ryots up to their work—no easy task. The Dangur women had none of the assumed modesty of the Hindoos. They grinned amiably and passed remarks freely with the men. Their children romped about enjoying the gathering of sticks, each one with his bundle ready for taking home.

Raja rode amongst them. Soon after a start was made, and his keen eyes roamed over the big patch of land which seemed overcrowded with workers ; but he knew there was not a man too many for the

task that lay before them. The coolies were mostly of the poorer class—wretched looking beings, lazy, degraded, and forbidding in appearance. It was not the Sahib's fault, they had never been otherwise for generations. He took them as he found them, accepted their condition as unalterable on account of their apathy.

When he first came to Evermore he tried to reform these creatures, and his jamadar grinned at his fruitless endeavours. Many of them were deaf and dumb, others silly and idiotic ; some were cripples ; many had nameless diseases. For months he strove to induce them to change their filthy habits, but the task was beyond him. He raged at them, but all to no purpose ; they were too far down in the human scale to understand. They resented his interference ; their work done, they wished to live as they listed. Had he persevered with his schemes he would have had no men to work for him. After a year or two he became accustomed to seeing them wandering about, soul-less, little better than animals—not nearly so clean. He became indifferent to their withered skins and shrunken frames, their half starved looks and idle ways. They were contented when he ceased trying to help them ; it was beyond their understanding to better their condition. He paid them well, far better than many planters, and for this they showed him some small measure of thanks. He saw they had plenty of rice and parched peas, and wondered at the small amount of food necessary for their existence. It shocked him at first to come across dead bodies, but his experience of a famine showed him that they died off like flies, and an odd corpse or two was a matter of indifference.

Visitors to Evermore invariably congratulated him on the condition of his men ; he merely laughed and said it must be a healthy district, for they were in no wise treated differently to coolies on other farms. That they were more contented, men who had difficulties with their labourers knew, and wondered at the reason.

Men, women and children looked up at him, smiling as he rode along. Sometimes he greeted them, but more frequently passed without notice.

Leaving the workers he rode over a grassy plain until he came to a small village. Here he found several men idling, and with a volley of abuse, in the native vernacular, he hurried them away to their work. They scowled at him, and obeyed with unusual alacrity ; the heavy whip in his hand did not look pleasant : the lash would cut and sting. He rode up to a hut where a woman sat crouching in the opening, squatting on her hams, her arms crossed in front of her knees. On her wrists were heavy metal bracelets. Over her head was a white cloth which fell on to her shoulders and reached to the ground. He knew this was the bewitched wife of the man who had stolen his neighbour's poultry. He made inquiries, playing quietly with his whip, and looking the woman in the face.

She had a pitiful tale to tell. It was true her husband had stolen the fowl ; but it was owing to him and he could not get payment. She had suffered —had foamed at the mouth, and nearly choked ; her limbs became rigid, and she lay as one dead. She had recovered, but still felt ill ; she implored the Sahib to pluck out the heart of the man who had brought this evil upon her. Her husband was at

work ; the Sahib knew him for a good man, and one willing to do hard labour.

Raja inquired where the man, who had brought this evil upon her, lived, and she pointed out his hut. He went to it, and found the wife ready to explain. Her story was long ; it was a case of jealousy. Her husband paid too much attention to her neighbour's wife, and this was the cause of all the trouble.

Raja informed them if he heard any more complaints through the jamadar he would bundle them out of the village. As he rode back he met Krishna, who looked bright and fresh, her white teeth showing in a cheerful smile. He stopped his horse, and spoke to her.

"I have told your father what I think of Paroes," he said.

She started and came close to the horse.

"You said I had been to you ?" she asked.

"No ; but I told him it was time you were at work, that you were old enough to help him—and me."

"Work !" she said. "Not there ?" and she pointed to the field where the coolies were still moving about in a black mass.

Raja smiled as he replied, "Not exactly. You are far too good to work there, Krishna. I said I wanted you at Evermore, in my bungalow."

Her eyes shone brightly ; her face showed her pleasure.

"And what did he say ?"

"That you were all he had at home, his only child, and that he would be lonely without you."

She muttered something he did not hear.

"Would you like to be in my service, Krishna ? "

“ Yes, Sahib ; it is what I long for ; but I dare not ask.”

“ There will be some trouble with your father over it ; he is afraid of Paroes, and the priest would not like you to come to my place.”

“ What the Sahib wills is done,” she said, “ and Paroes has no power : he is dirt.”

“ He is,” said Raja, smiling. “ A very nasty man, indeed. I told your father if Paroes meddled with any of my people I would thrash him.”

“ I will be there to see,” she said.

He laughed heartily. Her satisfaction at the prospect of the Brahmin being horsewhipped was amusing.

“ If your father mentions about your coming to the bungalow, what shall you say ? ” he asked.

“ Tell him the Sahib must be obeyed, and I will go.”

“ You will show no eagerness to come to me ? ”

“ No ; it would not be well.”

He eyed her curiously. She spoke quite innocently.

“ You will come if he is willing ? ”

“ If it is the Sahib’s will.”

“ It is my will, but I do not wish to force you, Krishna.”

She looked at him reproachfully as she replied—

“ To be of your household will be much happiness.”

“ Are you returning home ? ”

For answer she walked alongside his horse, her movements were graceful. She was swift footed. He glanced down at her and thought how exquisitely she was formed ; the loose gown flowed round her, the shape of her limbs outlined as she moved. She carried her head erect, and there was strength and

symmetry in her body. Krishna was very far removed, indeed, from the ordinary women of the villages. Again he wondered if Abdool was really her father ; he could hardly believe it.

The Dangur women raised their heads as they passed, and then made significant gestures, keeping a sharp look out in case the Sahib turned his head.

“ She is the lucky one ! ” “ Krishna is the Sahib’s favourite ! ” “ Old Abdool must keep an eye on her.” Remarks in this strain passed between them as they laughed and chaffed. Abdool saw Krishna walking beside the Sahib’s horse, and frowned. Had he been speaking to her about the bungalow ? The jamadar had a poor opinion of Sahibs where girls, such as Krishna, were concerned ; he was a man of wide experience in this respect, but Raja Ranji was different from other men, and could be trusted. It was not fear of danger to her if she entered his service that troubled him : it was the dread of Paroes and that awful black god, with the shining eye and blazing mouth.

Raja left her at the jamadar’s dwelling, which was an old bungalow, formerly used as a residence by a planter, and far superior to the ordinary huts.

She waved her hand to him as she entered. There was something very European about Krishna in her ways and modes of speech.

The jamadar came home at noon in a gloomy frame of mind. Krishna saw the clouds gathered on his brow, and endeavoured to dispel them with a particularly tempting dish of curried chicken and rice, to which he was partial.

Abdool was generally comforted at the sight of food, and Krishna knew his weakness. She was

very handy about a dwelling, and had a natural taste for artistic effect, which she managed to make use of with a deplorable lack of materials. The jamadar's house was clean, the verandah cool, the lattice blinds shaded it from the sun. Krishna had servants who obeyed her ; they were cheap and plentiful.

Having finished his meal, Abdool smoked in peace, then he slept. Later on he went out to the field again, coming home at night.

“ Krishna, did the Sahib speak to you to-day ? ” was the irrelevant question he asked, having seen them conversing.

“ The Sahib is not dumb,” was the reply.

Abdool shuffled in his seat ; he was afraid of Krishna's sharp tongue.

“ What did he speak of ? ”

“ The coolies, the birds, the fishes, the beasts, and his jamadar,” said Krishna, banteringly.

“ He has told me it is time you went to work,” said Abdool.

“ With the Dangurs ? ” she asked.

Her father snorted wrathfully as he answered—

“ The jamadar's daughter does not work with outcasts.”

“ That is well,” said Krishna.

“ Where does she work ? ”

“ The Sahib wills that you enter his service ; work in his bungalow ; wait upon him ; see to his wants.”

“ He must be obeyed.”

Abdool looked angrily at her as he said—

“ You wish it ? ”

“ The Sahib must be obeyed,” she answered.

"He lives alone," said Abdool, cautiously.

"Paroës lives alone," snapped Krishna.

The answer was effective ; he had no argument to meet it.

"You are the light of my eyes. I cannot let you go," said Abdool.

"You have promised the light of your eyes to Paroës," she said.

Her answers roused his temper. He stood up towering over her, a gaunt, lean figure, his thin arms outstretched, his body quivering.

"Silence, child," he said. "Am I not your father ?"

"God knows," said Krishna.

He shook his fists at her in his rage, and then caught her roughly by the arm.

"You deny I am your father ?"

"I did not." She wrested her arm away.

"Paroës is a priest, a holy man, and he offers you to Shiva through himself. You will be the bride of a god," said Abdool, in an awe-stricken voice.

Krishna laughed harshly as she said—

"Paroës is a beast, a brute, a devil."

"Listen," replied Abdool. "Last night, in the temple of Shiva, I saw the god in anger. His eye flamed, his mouth shot out steam, and I fell on my knees afraid of death. The anger of the god was roused because I refused you to Paroës ; I consented, and his fury was gone. It is the will of the god in the temple of Shiva that you go to Paroës. His will must be obeyed or we are lost. Some terrible calamity will befall us."

"Paroës is clever ; it was a trick to frighten you," she replied.

“ Had you seen it you would think otherwise.”

“ It is no god in the temple of Shiva. Paroës is cunning, but he shall never have his will.”

Abdool wrung his hands in despair. He acknowledged the sanctity of the Brahmin ; regarded him with veneration and fear ; considered it would be an impious act to refuse him, and yet he hated him as a man.

“ What is to be done ? ” wailed Abdool.

“ I will go to the Sahib. He is stronger than Paroës ; he will protect us from him.”

“ Eternal wrath will fall upon me if I disobey him.”

“ Tell him I have fled to the Sahib because you ordered me to go to the temple ; he cannot but believe you. It will not be your fault.”

“ He will order me to take you away What then ? ”

“ You can ask the Sahib to give me up to him, and hear what he will say.”

Abdool trembled as he said in a whisper—

“ He would kill him.”

“ For my sake ! For my sake ! ” said Krishna. And the light in her face caused him to gaze at her with wondering eyes.

CHAPTER V

“ HOW LONG WILL IT LAST ? ”

THERE was an angry scene between Raja and his jamadar, Krishna being the cause. It was seldom the Sahib condescended to argue with his people, but in this case he intended soothing Abdool into a willing frame of mind. It was a mistake ; the jamadar took advantage of his leniency, seeing in it a sign of weakness, and became stubborn.

There being no prospect of convincing Abdool, he changed his tone and the jamadar shrunk away from the torrent of vituperation hurled at him.

“ You understand,” said Raja, “ Krishna enters this house in my service. It is not necessary for me to give you a reason, but I will. She comes here so that I can protect her from Paroës ; you hear me ? And you may tell him what I say.”

Abdool gave in ; there was no help for it, and in his heart he was glad it was so, for he knew the Sahib was a man of iron will to whom priests were nothing, and the vengeance of Shiva he laughed at.

“ When does the Sahib wish her to come ? ”

“ The sooner the better ; ask her.”

“ Paroës will be angry,” said Abdool, as a final remonstrance.

“ Damn Paroës,” said Raja savagely, and turned away.

Abdool went home at once. The thing was settled,

the Sahib had said the sooner the better, and as he must be obeyed, he might as well have credit for doing it quickly.

Khrisna saw him coming at the unusual hour, and judged something had happened. Her heart beat fast, a strange feeling swept over her, she quivered with excitement, breathlessly she waited for him to enter the house.

Abdool came in a hurry, there was no hesitation now, he had shifted his burden on to the Sahib's shoulders ; what must be must, and Paroes could not blame him.

" You are to go to the bungalow," he said.
" Quick, girl ! "

" When ? "

" Now. Pack up."

Krishna made no reply. She was filled with a great happiness, and hurried away to put a few, very few, articles in a bundle. In half an hour she was ready, and they set out.

When they reached the bungalow Raja was out ; he had no idea Abdool would carry out his instructions so swiftly

" Go in," said Abdool.

" Where am I to go ? "

" In there." He pointed to Raja's room, where he generally sat reading. " Go in there and wait."

" It is his room," said Krishna thoughtlessly

" How do you know ? " asked her father quickly. She saw her mistake.

" It looks like it," she replied.

He regarded her suspiciously for a few moments, then pushed her inside and left her.

Krishna looked round curiously, putting her

bundle on the floor. His desk attracted her, papers were scattered about on it, and some magazines. The cover on one drew her attention ; it was the head of a girl peering out of a bunch of flowers. She opened it and saw pictures of beautiful women and sighed ; she would never be like that. Hastily she closed it, and as she did so caught sight of her face in a small mirror. It was a lovely dusky face, comparing well with those in the book, losing nothing by comparison. She was startled ; was that really her face, could it be possible she was so beautiful ? Stepping closer she watched her features grow larger and then laughed, amused at the result.

Krishna was a woman after all, and no woman needs to be told when she is beautiful. The sight cheered her, and again she looked round the room inquisitively. There were cushions, rugs, Indian ornaments, curious pictures, and many chairs. It was a comfortable bachelor's room. With deft touches she rearranged the brilliantly coloured articles, blending their hues to suit her taste. The time passed quickly, being pleasantly occupied she gave no thought to it.

Stopping in her task she regarded the change with satisfaction, and as she glanced to the open windows leading on to the verandah, she saw the Sahib standing there regarding her with an amused smile on his face. He was not angry, that was evident, and she said—

“ Do you like it ? ”

“ Very much indeed. I had no idea you were so critical, you have made the room look far better than I ever saw it before.”

“ I am so glad.”

“ When did you come ? Does your father know ? ”

“ He came for me and brought me here ; I am to remain.”

“ He’s not lost much time,” thought Raja smiling. He commenced to realise that perhaps he had not thought of everything when he insisted upon Krishna coming to the bungalow. She meant to take him at his word and wait upon him. He could not treat her as an ordinary servant, she was far too nice for that. As he looked at her he thought she would be a pleasant companion for him, break the monotony of his life, brighten his home, change the atmosphere of the whole place as a woman only can.

He entered the room, sitting down in a low cane chair, and before he was aware of it, she had deftly placed a cushion at the back of his head ; he nestled into it with a sigh of contentment, after all it was pleasant to be looked after, waited upon by such a pretty girl as Krishna, why had he not thought of it before ?

“ You will spoil me, make me lazy,” he said, smiling at her as she stood before him.

“ The Sahib is never lazy.”

“ I am afraid he is, and your attentions will increase my desire for rest.”

Her eyes caught sight of the bundle on the floor. She took it up quickly and threw it onto the verandah.

“ What is that ? ” he asked.

“ Clothes. I was told to pack up and come.”

He laughed as he reckoned up the scantiness of her wardrobe by the size of the bundle, and with his accustomed alacrity for doing a thing when he

thought of it, determined to remedy the defect.

" You shall have some pretty dresses, Krishna. Tell me what you like."

Her eyes opened wide with pleasure. She had seen the beautiful dresses of the English ladies at the camp, and when they came to Evermore.

" You wish to give me them ? "

" I do. What is your idea of dress, Krishna ? "

He was amused and wondered what she would say

" I should like a robe of scarlet—no, that is too bright, something in soft clinging silk, a beautiful blue; no, a green, yes, a very light green ; no, saffron, that is best, I am dark ; saffron and green."

Raja laughed heartily as he replied—

" You have a good eye for colours, little girl, all those you have named would suit your dark hair, dark eyes admirably. Scarlet satin, how would that do, with figures of birds on it, or flowers, and studded with gems. Rubies for the eyes of the birds, diamonds and pearls amongst the flowers."

Her face changed.

" The Sahib mocks me," she said.

" They would all become you, Krishna."

He was conjuring up a vision of herself decked out in Oriental splendour, it would indeed be an entrancing sight.

She went out and picked up her bundle, opened it and showed him a large clean white robe.

" This will I wear to wait upon you."

" Excellent," said Raja. " There is nothing better than white."

The robe she had on was a dull yellow, and had seen some service, yet it became her, she could not be otherwise than graceful.

“ I dress to please the Sahib,” she replied.

“ You will not find that difficult, and you shall have three new costumes all for your own.”

She clapped her hands in delight.

“ What a child she is,” he thought.

“ One is to be green, a light wavy green, another saffron, and another blue. We will leave the scarlet for a state occasion, you see I remember all the colours.”

“ I will work for them.”

“ You must amuse me ; that will suffice.”

“ I will try I can dance.”

He made a grimace, the nautch dance of the Dangurs rose before him. He saw a number of gaudily dressed women glittering with spangles and cheap ornaments, wriggling, writhing, and twisting like snakes, making a horrible noise, and posturing in a manner unbecoming in polite society. Was Krishna to dance like this ?

She saw his smile and said—

“ You have not seen me dance, it is not like the women ; I can please you.”

“ When you have a new dress you shall dance for me,” he said. “ I will order one for that particular purpose.”

“ I can play the zither.”

He was surprised ; evidently Krishna had divers accomplishments.

“ You have one ? ”

“ No ; but I can play.”

“ You shall have a zither, a good one.”

“ The Sahib is kind.”

It amused him to promise her these things, and it would be something new for him to buy them.

He pictured himself in the bazaar at Sunpore, during the race week, purchasing silks and thereby causing comment. His acquaintances would wonder what had come over him, it was a matter of indifference to him what they thought.

Sunpore was a favourite place of his, he generally won a race or two and the camping out for a week or more suited him. The races would be on soon, and Evermore would not see him for several days. Krishna might go back to her father during his absence, or better still the jamadar might take up his abode in the bungalow until his return. It was hardly likely Paroes would venture to carry out his designs at Evermore.

It was time he made Krishna's presence known in the house, as yet the other servants were unaware of her presence.

An old Hindoo woman was in charge in the rear of the house. She had been with him many years, and was trustworthy. He had brought her from Calcutta. He caught a big fellow beating her, took her away from him, and told her she might make her home at Evermore. She consented and blessed the day she came. This action was typical of Raja ; he did not even ask her husband's consent to take her away. He called her Lisa, that was the nearest approach he could get to her name, and she raised no objections.

"I must tell Lisa you are here," he said rising.

Krishna waited until the old woman appeared, and Raja said—

"Krishna is going to stay here ; she will be useful to me. I wish her to look after this room, and you can give her light work."

Lisa looked from him to the girl and shook her head.

“ What is the matter ? ” asked Raja irritably

“ The Sahib has many servants,” she replied.

“ Therefore, one more will make no difference. She must have a room to herself.”

She nodded but made no reply ; it was easy to see she thought Krishna an unnecessary addition to the household.

“ Go with her,” said Raja, and the girl followed her.

Lisa pushed open the door of a room and said—

“ Will this do ? ”

“ As you will,” replied Krishna.

“ As the Sahib wills,” was the reply, and Lisa went away.

It was a small room with windows opening on to the side of the bungalow, and overlooking the compound in the direction of the stables. Krishna thought it clean and comfortable, there was a camp bed and a heap of soft mats, so she might sleep as she pleased.

Lisa muttered to herself as she went towards the kitchen. She did not wonder at the Sahib bringing the girl here, for she was beautiful, but she hated Krishna for coming. Ever since Raja rescued her from a brutal husband she had been devoted to him and was as jealous of him as a tigress over her cubs. He seldom spoke a harsh word to her, but this girl might change him. She knew nothing of his reason for having her in the house ; had she known she would probably have sided with Paroes in order to get rid of her. Lisa had worked and slaved all her life, and considered Krishna ought to do as she had

done, being only the jamadar's child. The Sahib's orders were imperative. She was to attend to his room, do light work, sleep alone. That meant to Lisa a life of idleness, and she saw no reason for it.

Raja understood something of the old Hindoo's feelings and made allowances for her.

"Krishna will win her over in time, I must give her a hint about it," he said to himself.

Alone in her room, the girl put on her white dress and smoothed out her hair. She had already seen Lisa did not like her, and she knew to be comfortable she must propitiate her. She went towards the kitchen and seeing the old woman said—

"I am come to help you, what can I do ? "

Lisa regarded her fixedly as she replied—

"There is no light work now. Go to the Sahib and amuse him."

The tone was uncivil ; her words conveyed a meaning only vaguely understood by Krishna, but she resented them.

"It is his will, and I can please him," she replied.

Lisa looked after her and said—

"Yes, you can please him, beauty face, but how long will it last ? "

CHAPTER VI

PAROES VOWS VENGEANCE

ABDOOL had a very bad time with the priest when next he visited the temple. Paroës knew he was powerless against Raja, and that it would not be well for him to measure strength with him, nevertheless he determined to have Krishna. He threatened Abdool with all manner of punishments, frightened him thoroughly, and then gradually excused him.

“ You must help me when the time comes,” he said. “ I will contrive some plan to get her away, and you shall assist me.”

“ The Sahib has been very good to me,” protested Abdool.

“ He has no right to have your daughter at the Bungalow. If she came to me it would be a different matter, no one would make remarks at her visits to the temple.”

“ She is safe with the Sahib, he never molests women.”

Paroës smiled as he replied,

“ You think that. Abdool, you are a fool ; we shall see.”

He thought it best not to lay too much blame on Abdool, and bade him inform him of everything that went on in Raja’s house.

Paroës entered the temple when Abdool left him, passed round the idol and entered the room at the rear. He had fitted it up at some expense, taking care to make it attractive, for he intended Krishna should use it. As he looked round his wrath blazed forth, and he uttered terrible threats against Raja. Paroës was one of those dangerous sensuous Brahmins who, having mixed with Europeans, and seen much of life in Calcutta, copied their vices and shunned their virtues. He was clever, a cunning rogue, well adapted to command obedience from ignorant Hindoos whose ill-formed minds were quite incapable of contending against his will. In such a place as Evermore, and the numerous villages around it, he was powerful. The ryots and others regarded the Brahmins as holy men, their religious supremacy, established during many centuries, never being questioned. They were a sacred caste, and there were many of them, some lazy and vagabondish, leading a wandering life, others in charge of the temples where they drew certain revenues and lived on the offerings of the Hindoos, who were afraid to refuse their demands, while a third class were attached to families as private priests. To the second class Paroës belonged, and he was sent from Calcutta to the temple near Evermore, through the influence of some of his brethren, when the city became too hot to hold him. In Calcutta he had led a disgraceful life, over which it is better to draw a veil ; it suffices to say he sank to the lowest depths of degradation and became a person regarded with suspicion by the authorities. Established at Evermore, he restrained himself to a certain extent, but there were times when the scenes in Shiva's temple

were wicked enough to call down the wrath of the Deity upon him. Most of the people knew his true character, but dare not rebel against his sinful ways. Children ran away when they saw him, mothers sent their daughters into the huts at his approach. He noticed these things and made their lot harder whenever it lay in his power.

He seldom met Raja Ranji, there had been no encouragement from the Sahib, who despised him and knew him for what he was. Paroes hated him, he had no difficulty in finding out that Raja upheld his people when they grumbled at his exactions. Very few words passed between them, but on one occasion the Sahib had told Paroes what he thought of him in unmistakable language, and the priest resented it.

Now there was a new cause of feud between them. Krishna was for the present safe from him, but he vowed it should not be for long.

Seated in the room he had planned for her reception, Paroes endeavoured to find out some means of drawing the girl away from the Bungalow. It was difficult and dangerous, Raja was not to be trifled with, he was quick with his blows.

Paroes was aware that at certain seasons of the year the Sahib left Evermore for several days at a time. One of those annual absences was near at hand, the race week at Sunpore. During that time his opportunity might arise, as Krishna would, in all probability, go home until his return. Paroes had no doubt in his evil mind for what purpose the Sahib had made Abdool take her to the bungalow, and this only increased his rage against him. Living as he did, and had always done, a life of lies and

hypocrisy, it was beyond him to imagine a nature such as Raja Ranji's, who possessing power, naturally used it to gain his own ends and gratify his passions, at least this was his opinion.

The poor weak minded ryots regarded the Brahmins as above the law, but not so the Sahib, who would have felt no compunction in hauling Paroes before the magistrate to answer for any misdeed for which he was liable. The wily priest knew this, and was careful to keep within the letter of the law, which he had not studied in vain. Paroes would have made an excellent lawyer from one point of view, namely, driving a bullock team through any statute in existence. He possessed the shrewd sharp intellect of the better men of his caste with none of their good qualities. All day long he remained in the shade of the temple meditating, scheming against the liberty of Krishna.

Shiva's temple was in a favoured spot, where the heat of the sun was tempered by the shade of the trees, and the lake close at hand made the atmosphere endurable. He heard the steps of people as they crept in and out of the temple, but he did not disturb himself ; once he exerted himself to beat the boy who waited upon him for some imaginary failing. Paroes revelled in cruelty, he tortured birds and animals with a keen sense of enjoyment, their agonised struggles affording him excellent amusement. There was an old well at the rear of the temple which could have told tales ; the ryots shunned it, they had heard sounds issuing from its depths which made them shudder. There was a pathway from the temple to the well, and sometimes spots of blood were to be seen on it.

The Sahib knew none of these things, and no one dared to tell him for fear of the revenge of the priest. Dim vague rumours from time to time reached him that Paroës offered up sacrifices, but he laughed, and said the Brahmin had not courage enough to kill anything, even if it was part of his religion to do so.

At night Paroës stole out and walked towards Evermore. He seldom ventured near the bungalow, he was aware the Sahib was capable of setting his dogs onto him if he was seen. He had a certain amount of brute courage, which made him more dangerous than he looked. As he passed through a small village the ryots saluted him, but the women hearing news of his coming had hidden in the huts. Dogs barked at him, the boys made grimaces behind his back. He knew he was feared and the knowledge pleased him. No one followed him, and he was alone after going a few hundred yards. The night was dark, but he knew his way. One side of the compound was near the bungalow ; he could see onto the verandah without going inside. Crouching down he watched the light in Raja's room, it glowed brightly, casting a reflection out at the windows, which stood open. Presently he saw Krishna come out ; she was dressed in white, and her figure was clearly defined. Raja followed her, she placed his chair, handed him cigars and a glass of some liquid.

Paroës cursed Krishna, the Sahib, and all his belongings. She waited upon him hand and foot, was his slave, and he had taken her from him. After that interview with Abdool he regarded her as his property, it was a staggering blow when he

heard she was at Evermore. He shook his fists at them and rage possessed him.

Krishna sat down at the Sahib's feet and he stroked her hair caressingly. This was too much for Paroes, he rose hurriedly to his feet and went rapidly away. His blood was on fire at what he had seen, torments got hold upon him, thwarted desires drove him frantic. The pace at which he walked cooled his fever and gradually he settled down into a more rational frame of mind. He would have a great revenge, and Krishna should not only be his, but he would torture her when he had her in his power.

Arriving at the temple he cast himself on the mats in his room and for long lay meditating how he could punish her.

Unaware of the baneful eyes upon them, Krishna and Raja talked merrily and the time went swiftly by. She amused him, and he smiled at her child-like happiness.

“When I go to Sunpore I will bring back your dresses,” he said.

She looked up quickly as she asked—

“Where shall I go then, remain here ? ”

“Yes, I think that will be best, and your father can come and stay at the bungalow.”

“Shall you be away long ? ”

“About a week. You will have nothing to be afraid of.”

“Paroes will know you are away.”

“He dare not touch you here, you must not leave the compound until my return. If he prowls about the dogs shall be set upon him.”

“I shall be very glad when you return.”

“ To see the dresses ? ”

“ To have you here.”

“ Then you think me a decent sort of Sahib ? ”
he asked smiling.

“ What is that ? ”

“ A good sort of fellow.”

“ The best burra Sahib ever known.”

“ That is rather a tall order,” he said.

She looked puzzled and he explained.

“ I am afraid I am far from being the best, there are many men better.”

She shook her head as she replied—

“ Not to me. To me you will always be the only Sahib worth serving.”

He patted her head, it was shapely, and she rested it on his knee. Her confidence and faith in him was great, and he was worthy of it.

“ Do you remember when you were a tiny little girl ? ” he asked.

She was thoughtful and then said—

“ Sometimes I dream I was in a big palace and a great man in a soldier’s uniform played with me. He had a sword with a gold handle all covered with jewels. I remember them, how they sparkled, There were elephants, many of them, and hundreds of horses. Crowds of people were there and they moved about beautiful gardens where fountains played, and birds in golden cages sang songs. I sometimes dream these things, but I think they were real when I was very young.”

He listened attentively. Krishna had a vivid imagination, but she must have seen many brilliant scenes to paint them as she did. Abdool her father ? It was ridiculous, but if not, who was she ? There

were many children handed over to the care of such men as Abdool Chunder and his wife, it was a convenient way of obviating the necessity for answering awkward questions. Many a beautiful girl such as Krishna owned an Englishman for her father. What matter who her parents were, she was an enchanting, bewitching Indian maiden, and that sufficed.

“ You tell fairy tales well,” he said smiling.

“ You do not believe it ? ”

“ That you have lived in a Rajah’s palace ? ”

“ I did not say a Rajah’s palace,” she replied.

“ But it sounded very like it. Where did all the elephants come from ? How many were there ? ”

“ Hundreds, and there were cannons, big heavy guns, and the elephants pulled them.”

“ You remember that ? ”

“ Yes, I saw them.”

“ I must ask Abdool about it.”

“ No, you must not do so ; he is angry if I mention it.”

Raja whistled slowly ; he fancied he knew why his jamadar disliked such a turn in her conversation.

“ And is he very terrible when he is angry ? ”

She laughed as she replied—

“ He never beats me, and therefore I do not like to displease him.”

“ Good girl. Now go to bed.”

She rose immediately, obedience was natural to her, and he watched her as she went.

“ Who the deuce can she be ? She is no more like old Abdool than that door mat. Some young officer’s daughter, I’ll bet ; he does not know what

a treasure he has given away. She is worth her weight in gold. I have half a mind to take her to Sunpore and Abdool along with her. I wonder what the fellows would say, and their sisters and wives."

He laughed to himself as he pictured their looks of freezing disapproval at the presence of Krishna in his tent.

"The men would like her, the women would be jealous of her. I'll think it over. Probably the final conclusion would be that it was another of my eccentricities."

CHAPTER VII

ON THE GRASS TRACK

RAJA was on the training grounds superintending the work of his horses, making up his mind which to send to Sunpore for the race week. Gazelle, the grey Arab, would be one, but he had some doubts as to which of the others ought to go. Mogul, a five year old bay, dashed past, his dark rider handling him well. He had won at Bombay and Calcutta : at the former place before he came into Raja's possession. Destiny followed close after him, a powerful brown horse, six years old, one capable of carrying weight, and a stayer.

“Almost too good for Sunpore,” thought Raja. “If he runs there he is sure to win, and I want to spring a dark horse on them for the Viceroy's Cup.”

For many years he had lived in hopes of winning this race, and had not succeeded, although some of his horses had run well. When he bought Destiny he had an idea fortune would favour him, and for two years he kept the horse with a view to this event. A run at Sunpore would do him good, but at the same time show what class of animal he was.

The Caliph and Ghamin went along together, the former a bright, handsome chestnut ; the latter a grey; and the last pair were Black Island and Kyban, both bays. They were a very even lot, and it is

doubtful whether a casual observer would not have selected The Caliph in preference to Destiny.

The galloping ground was an open grass plain, the going generally being good, not more than a couple of miles from the stables. Here Raja had trained horses and ponies for a long time, and found it admirably suited to the purpose. He improved it year by year until it became the best ground in the district, and his neighbours were always anxious, when they had a horse they fancied, to have him galloped there. Raja had no objection to taking a few horses into his stables belonging to friends, but he declined to accept any payment beyond the cost of their keep and the hire of boys. He did his best with them, and sometimes they beat his own horses. At present he had nothing at Evermore belonging to any of the planters in the neighbourhood.

The boy riding Destiny pulled up at his signal, and came towards him. Raja looked him carefully over and said—

“ Give him a good gallop home from that post,” and he pointed to the place with his whip.

The boy cantered him across and started. Destiny stretched out in splendid style, and pleased Raja immensely.

“ I’ll keep him at home,” he said. “ He is far too good for Sunpore.”

Coming towards him, from the direction of Evermore, he saw a horse and rider.

“ Harry Lavaux,” he said, with a smile. “ He generally turns up about this time.”

The new comer greeted him heartily as he said—

“ It’s ages since I saw you, Raja, but I suppose it is my own fault.”

"It is certainly not mine," replied Raja smiling, "and I am very glad to see you again. Where have you been, not at Birdsville all the time?"

"No, my friend; I have been to Calcutta; had a deuce of a time there. Met a heap of jolly fellows, splendid girls, an old flame of yours amongst the number."

Raja laughed as he replied, "Tell me her name. I cannot recollect the lady"

"She said she had been at Evermore, thought it a delightful place, and the owner thereof a prince of good fellows. Upon my word, Raja, you made an impression, although you don't seem to be aware of it."

"An impression does not create a flame," said Raja.

"Anyway, the lady gave me to understand that she thought you a delightful host."

"Her name," laughed Raja.

"Guess."

"Impossible, I know very few ladies."

"Mrs. Margrave, a most bewitching widow."

Raja smiled as he replied, "I know her, and like her. There are few women of my acquaintance I admire so much, but she is not an old flame of mine. Has she been long in Calcutta?"

"Arrived from London six or seven weeks ago. She went home when her husband died. She is here as the guest of the Viceroy. What do you think of that?"

"I am not surprised; Captain Margrave always stood well with the Court circle. He was a splendid fellow, and she was very devoted to him."

"So I believe, but he was a go ahead man in his young days, I am told."

“ We have all done our share at going the pace,” said Raja. “ You cannot take a back seat on that score.”

Harry Lavaux laughed heartily as he replied—

“ Some of us have not left off going it yet. You are a model planter, Raja ; we really ought to have your picture hung in our bungalows to give an air of respectability to them.”

“ I’ll see about it when I go to Calcutta,” said Raja smiling.

“ Do, there’s a good fellow, and mind you have plenty of them done. What’s that, Destiny ? By Jove ! he’s grown into a splendid horse, and looks fit. Are you going to run him at Sunpore ? ”

“ It is Destiny, and Sunpore is not his destination.”

“ Flying at higher game, eh ? I don’t blame you ; he looks worth it.”

“ That’s The Caliph,” said Raja.

“ Better looking than the other one ; but I don’t care for those bright chestnuts, they are generally flash.”

“ There’s Mogul over there ; how does he suit you ? ”

“ Fine horse, a bit leggy. Is he going to the camp ? ”

“ Yes ; I’ll take him to Sunpore ; also Black Island and Kyban.”

“ A strong team ; I wish I had something to run.”

“ Buy one of mine.”

“ You mean it ? ”

“ Certainly ; you can have your pick, bar Destiny and Mogul.”

“ I’ll look them over in the stables,” said Harry Lavaux.

" You'll come to breakfast and stay the day ? " asked Raja.

" I came over with that intention," he replied, laughing.

" Good," said Raja. " I have some real fine old Tokay. What do you say to a bottle ? "

" I can help you with it."

" My wine merchant tells me it is forty years old, and I try and believe him."

" So will I ; probably it is."

" For purposes of trade."

" Quite so ; " laughed Harry

Harry Lavaux was a planter residing at Birdsville, an estate adjoining Raja Ranji's. He came from Queensland, and had been in the country several years, doing well, and had prospered by Raja's advice. It was one of Raja's good qualities that he always endeavoured to help a man when he honestly desired his advice. Harry Lavaux had found him a genuine friend, and knew his worth. When he settled at Birdsville he had an uphill task, and had it not been for Raja he would probably have lost his money, become disgusted with the place, and cleared out a considerably poorer man. This would, no doubt, have happened had not Raja dissuaded him from sacrificing his capital, and advised him to hold on.

" I blundered along for four or five years when I first came here," said Raja, " and felt very much as you feel ; but I stuck to it, and you see the result. It will be the same with you."

Harry Lavaux followed his advice, and was now reaping the benefit. His estate was not so large as Raja's, but it was equally profitable, and the young

planter's income was far larger than he had anticipated. He was ten years Raja's junior, and the older man exercised considerable influence over him for his good. He knew nothing of Raja beyond what he had seen of him at Evermore, but that was sufficient to convince him whoever he was, and whatever his name might be, he was a man whose acquaintance was worth cultivating and keeping. They rode to Evermore together, and when they were seated at breakfast Krishna waited upon them.

Harry Lavaux wondered at the girl's beauty and grace. She moved noiselessly about attending to their wants. She was not in the least surprised to see him there. She knew the Sahib often had visitors. She saw he was watching her, and smiled as she recognised he admired her. She was glad it was so, because she was the Sahib's servant.

"Where the deuce did you find her?" asked Harry when they were alone.

"The girl Krishna?"

"Yes."

"She is my jamadar's daughter."

"Old Abdool's child!" exclaimed Harry, surprised.

"So he says. I hardly believe him."

Harry Lavaux laughed as he replied—

"She does not favour him."

"There is no resemblance at all," said Raja.

"She is a beautiful girl."

"I am glad you think so; that is my opinion."

"I wish I had the luck to find someone as pretty to wait upon me. You are a lucky fellow, Raja."

"She is much safer here than at Birdsville."

"That's rather rough on me," said Harry.

"Not at all ; you are young and susceptible. I am old and staid."

"So you consider yourself the guardian of all the pretty girls in the district ; is that it ? "

"Partially correct only. I mean to be the guardian of Krishna. She needs one."

"There's Abdool."

"He's incompetent. Abdool is a very worthy man ; at the same time he is a fool."

"Most of 'em are," said Harry.

"He is priest ridden. I believe he would sooner face a tiger than a priest."

"I know something about that ; but I should have thought Abdool had more sense."

"It is his weak point. There's a wretch of a Brahmin here named Paroes, has a temple dedicated to Shiva, and he has thoroughly terrorised my jamadar. What do you think the beast wanted ? "

"The girl ! "

"Yes ; he wanted Krishna, and Abdool gave his consent. She came and told me her tale, and that is the reason she is here ; if that fellow tries to harm her he'll have me to reckon with, not Abdool."

"He'll make trouble ; I know the fellows."

"If I have the opportunity I'll horsewhip him."

Harry Lavaux grew serious. He knew the power some of these priests had over the ryots and others, and Raja was single-handed.

"Let him alone, he's not worth meddling with," he said.

"I have no desire to soil my hands with him ; but if he attempts to molest Krishna he had better beware."

"Does the girl fear him ? "

“ Naturally ; but she hates him, and if you had seen the little flash of steel that I saw, when his name was brought up, you would not give much for Paroes' life if he pressed her hard.”

“ She has courage.”

“ Plenty of it ; and I shall back her up.”

“ What is Abdool's opinion ? ”

“ He has shifted the responsibility on to my shoulders. He pretends to be in grievous trouble, but I know better ; he is very much relieved.”

“ He brought her here ? ”

“ Yes, half an hour or so after I said she must come.”

Harry Lavaux looked at him admiringly. He was well aware old Abdool must have the most implicit faith in Raja to leave the girl at the bungalow. He knew the bulk of the men of his class were not over particular in their dealings where such a girl as Krishna was concerned. He wondered if Raja took any account of the risk, the temptation he was running. His host was one of the most honourable of men, but to be constantly alone, in the company of such a beautiful girl, who was entirely subject to his will, and would consider herself honoured by his attentions, was a grave source of danger. With the best intentions in the world towards her, Raja might find the situation too strong for him. He smoked for some time in silence, thinking over these things until Krishna appeared with glasses and wine.

Raja smiled at her and Harry said—

“ He is a very good Sahib.”

Krishna nodded her head, and put down the tray.

“ Pour out the wine,” said Raja.

She did so, and handed the glasses ; then she left them.

“ It is a long time since I saw a girl to compare with her,” said Harry.

“ They are difficult to find.”

“ Can you discover one for me ? ”

“ No,” replied Raja, “ you are better without.”

“ That is selfish.”

“ It is good advice. There are difficulties connected with such girls in a household.”

“ And you think I could not cope with them ? ”

“ Not in my way.”

Harry laughed as he replied—

“ Perhaps you are right ; I am not suited for dangerous experiments.”

Raja looked at him quietly as he said—

“ You think this a dangerous experiment ? ”

“ It would be for some men.”

“ But not for me ? ”

“ No, I do not think there is any danger you could not successfully overcome if you gave your mind to it.”

CHAPTER VIII

PREPARING FOR THE CAMP

IN the evening they went to the stables and Harry Lavaux, who was anxious to have something at Sunpore, asked the price of Kyban.

“ I think he’ll suit me and I can ride him in the Planters’ Stakes,” he said.

“ You can have him for two thousand rupees,” replied Raja, “ he is well worth it.”

Lavaux knew the price was not too high and bought him at once.

“ Will you keep him here, and train him for me ?” he asked.

“ With pleasure, it will only be for a few days, but you can send him back after the races if you wish. I shall run The Caliph in the Planters’ Stakes.”

“ And ride him yourself ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Have I chance of beating you ? ”

“ You have, the two horses are evenly matched, and you ride even better than myself.”

“ I am not so sure about that,” he replied.

The lads were stabling the horses for the night, working silently and swiftly. When the Sahib was about there was no shirking. Abdool came up,

grumbling about the ryots as usual, but ceased complaining when he saw Raja had a visitor.

"Mr. Lavaux has bought Kyban," said Raja, "and he will remain here. See that the same lad looks after him, and pay special attention to him."

The jamadar promised to carry out his instructions, and Harry said—

"If he wins the Planters' Race at Sunpore you shall have a couple of hands full of rupees."

Abdool smiled ; the mere thought of such a wind fall was satisfying.

He remained at Evermore until the next day, and at night they sat up late talking over bygone times.

"How many years have you been in camp at Sunpore ?" asked Harry.

"Off and on over a dozen. I think it is a jolly place, I like it."

"And you generally win there ?"

"For the last six years I have never gone without winning something. You will camp with me as usual ?"

"I shall be delighted. Yours is always a jolly place, have you got the old pitch ?"

"Yes, under the trees, the big chestnuts ; it is as good as any, and I have it every year. Somehow I think the parties are not quite so jolly as they were, but I hear that this year there will be a big crowd and several English visitors will be present with the officers."

"Mrs. Margrave is going."

"Whose guest is she to be ?"

"With Major and Mrs. Kane, so she informed me."

"Then she will be in good company. Bruce

Kane is all that a soldier ought to be, no wonder he is a popular officer. I have not seen his wife, he has not been married long."

"She is a pretty woman, much younger than her husband. I met her in Calcutta."

"Anything like Mrs. Margrave?"

"Oh no, not so—what shall I call it?—say amiable."

"Bad tempered? that will not be well for the Major."

"I do not know her sufficiently well to form an opinion, but I think she is fond of admiration—flighty is the word."

"That does not make for happiness in the domestic circle," replied Raja. "The Major deserved a better fate, but perhaps you are mistaken."

"I hope so," answered Harry doubtfully.

"Send your belongings over here, and they can go with mine."

"It's very kind of you, old fellow, you take no end of trouble to make your friends happy."

"That's better than rendering them uncomfortable."

"I wish all the people I know were of the same opinion."

"How would it be to take Krishna?" asked Raja.

Harry Lavaux laughed as he said—

"That would create a sensation. Raja Ranji with a beautiful Indian girl to wait upon him. What would the ladies say?"

"I am rather anxious to know. Suppose I give them the opportunity of expressing their opinions?"

"You are joking."

"On the contrary, I am serious."

"She would certainly be an addition to your camp."

"Give me the benefit of your advice."

"If you do not wish to shock all your lady friends leave her at home. They would never forgive you."

Raja laughed as he replied—"They would get over it. I have an idea Krishna would be a general favourite before the camp broke up."

"With the men."

"And also the women ; she has a very winning way."

"His thoughts constantly go back to the girl," said Harry to himself. "He's a curious man, I wonder what will come of it."

"You will do as you please, of course, but I strongly advise you to leave her at Evermore."

"Perhaps you are right," said Raja. "I was thinking of Paroes, but he would not dare molest her here ; if he did, I'd shoot him like a dog."

"She will be quite safe at Evermore," replied Harry, "and you will not be away long."

When Lavaux left Raja sent for Abdool and told him of his early departure for Sunpore.

"You must stay here during my absence and look after Krishna," he said. "I do not suppose Paroes will show his ugly face, but if he ventures into the compound you can have him beaten off the premises. You understand, there must be no half measures. No harm will come to you, because he will not make any complaint. You hear ? "

"Yes, Sahib, and I do not think he will come here."

"Neither do I, but in case he ventures, remember

what I have told you. There are plenty of men and dogs here."

Krishna came and he explained to her that her father would remain at Evermore.

"If Paroes dares to come he is to be hunted off the place," he said.

"If my father will not do it, I will," she said.

Raja smiled at her eagerness, she seemed to desire an opportunity to make things unpleasant for the priest.

"Abdool has my orders and will obey them," said Raja. "You must keep out of harm's way."

During the remainder of the week he was preparing for the camp, sending loads on the bullock carts. It was a long distance to Sunpore, but they thought very little of such a journey, and made it much quicker than might have been expected.

Raja superintended the packing, and saw there was an ample supply of carpets, cushions, camp chairs, tennis requisites, saddles, guns, fishing tackle, lanterns, and a variety of odds and ends. The provision cart required to be well stocked, for Raja always had a full tent at meal times, and for the after dinner smoke at night. Abdool, on former occasions, accompanied him, but this time it was necessary to take another man to superintend the servants.

"I shall put Hasan in your place," he said to Abdool. "He is a reliable man, not equal to my jamadar, but the best I can select."

"Hasan will serve the Sahib well," answered Abdool.

The lads at Evermore always looked forward with glee to the annual visit to Sunpore, it was the one break in the monotony of their life for the majority,

only the best riders visiting Calcutta and other places. Sunpore, however, was a national festival with the natives for hundreds of miles round and a huge concourse of people flocked in to the fair. It was a week of merriment, free from hard work.

Hasan received the Sahib's orders with a bland smile of satisfaction. He had often been to Sunpore, generally as second in command to Abdool. He felt the burden of responsibility upon him when he heard he was to take Abdool's place, and his form seemed to swell out with self-satisfaction.

Raja was amused at him and said—

“ You are equal to the work, I think, Hasan.”

He bowed and said such was the case, he had looked forward to serving him in this capacity. Hasan was a follower of Mahomed, and regarded Hindoos with an open contempt, making an exception in favour of the jamadar.

He was as devout as most of the prophet's followers and also well versed in the language of abuse used by them on the slightest provocation. He had travelled much and visited Egypt and Arabia. His knowledge of horses and their management was greater than Abdool's, and the jamadar, aware of it, gave him control over the stables.

Hasan was a favourite with the boys, he regaled them with stories, of which he had a goodly store, and managed to get more work out of them than Abdool.

When the news that Hasan was to be in charge at the camp, and Abdool to remain at Evermore, reached them, there was a flutter of excitement and they promised themselves a good time at Sunpore.

Raja was busily looking after the despatch of the

horses when a messenger arrived from the Rajah of Shirazi, that he wished to see him if he could conveniently attend. It was awkward, but he did not care to disoblige the Rajah, who was powerful and a good friend.

In an hour he was riding towards Shirazi, through a beautiful country abounding with game, and well wooded. Hunting with the Rajah was good sport for he was a hard rider and a dead shot.

As he drew near to the gates of the palace he saw there were strangers there and wondered who they might be, probably guests invited for the Sunpore week. It occurred to him the Rajah might wish him to join the party, if so he must make an excuse ; he had already prepared his camp and expected invited guests.

The Rajah was a fine looking man, tall, of commanding appearance, proud, despotic, a ruler over some millions of people. He came of an ancient race, of far greater antiquity than many monarchs, and gloried in his ancestry. His power was great, and he wielded it justly. He was a trusted ally of the Government, and had ready to place at their disposal a standing army of men whose services had already been tried and not found wanting. He had been to England, where he received special marks of honour at the hands of his ruler, and at the India Office, he was the central figure in all the brilliant throng at the reception. Standing over six feet high he was built in proportion, and he looked what he indisputably was, a mighty ruler. Courteous and affable, full of manly spirit, he allowed no liberties to be taken, and was careful never to give offence if it could be avoided. His palace was one of

the sights of the empire, of which more will be read, and he was generous in extending privileges to people desiring to see its wealth and wonders.

Raja Ranji considered himself a lucky man to have the hand of friendship held out to him by the Rajah. He knew there were men of far higher social standing than himself, who would have given much to be in his shoes. The Rajah showed a keen insight and knowledge of men in singling out Raja for his special regard. With the planter he could converse freely without the necessity for framing his words to suit official feelings. Raja probably knew more of the inner life of the Rajah of Shirazi than any Government official, from the Viceroy downwards. He had been in nearly every part of the palace, roaming about alone, a thing seldom heard of at Shirazi. He had even been introduced to the Rajah's wife, an honour and a privilege he was aware seldom if ever bestowed upon a stranger.

The Rajah saw him riding towards the palace and waited for him to come.

Raja Ranji did not keep him long, after dusting his clothes and making himself presentable, he went to greet his host. It was a proof of the esteem in which the Rajah held him that he came into his presence dressed in an ordinary way. The Rajah thanked him for coming and said—

“I wished to consult you about my horses for Sunpore. Which do you think I ought to take?”

Raja Ranji knew all the racers well ; in fact had bought most of them for him. Without any hesitation he selected Akbar, Wonderful, The Sheik, Arabian and Cairo.

The Rajah smiled as he replied—

“ Four of these I selected, the fifth was Decca.”

“ Instead of Wonderful ? ” asked Raja.

“ That is so, you are clever.”

“ Not at all, they are your best horses.”

“ Akbar will win the Sunpore Cup.”

“ He should do so.”

“ If Destiny does not run.”

“ I am not sending Destiny.”

The Rajah’s face brightened.

“ You are afraid Akbar will beat him ? ”

“ No.”

“ Your reason, if you will give it me.”

The tone was one of command, but Raja knew it was not meant as such to him.

“ With pleasure, I am keeping him for Calcutta.”

“ I would give a lac of rupees to win the Cup this December,” said the Rajah.

Raja knew what that meant, it was an offer for Destiny, and over six thousand pounds was a great sum.

“ Your Highness commands ? ” he asked.

“ No, I request, if you are willing.”

“ Forgive me if I decline,” said Raja. “ I have tried for many years to win that race.”

“ Consider the matter. We shall meet at Sunpore. You will be my guest when you please, my camp is always open to you, also my house. I wished to know if Destiny was going to Sunpore. I am glad he is not, you are wise. I thank you for so quickly obeying my messenger.” He held out his hand and Raja felt a firm grip; it was a friendly shake and he was relieved. He had no wish to cross the Rajah’s will, but it was asking a great deal to part with Destiny.

CHAPTER IX

AT SUNPORE

THERE was a busy scene at Sunpore when Raja Ranji arrived. The camp was already formed under the chestnut and mango trees which fringed the race-course, and afforded admirable ground for the purpose. About a mile in extent the various camps were separate, each one having a party of native watchmen as a guard. This was necessary to prevent thieving, for the camp and the surrounding country was crowded by hundreds of natives, all considering it lawful to annex other people's property. Each camp had its mess tent, with a shamiana in front fitted up luxuriously as a drawing-room. The shamiana was a large fringed canopy, a pleasant place of adjournment after dinner. There was also a mud kitchen in which a surprising number of dainty dishes were turned out by the cooks, and each owner of a camp tried to outdo his neighbour in hospitality. The course ran round a flat plain, which on the extreme outside could not be much less than four or five miles in extent. Raja's camp was pitched under thick green foliage of some magnificent chestnuts, and here he found everything in readiness, only a few finishing touches being required to put the place in perfect order.

The Rajah had a house close at hand, in addition to his camping ground, and his horses were stabled

there ; also those from Evermore. This was a privilege Raja fully appreciated, for there was no danger of anything happening to them, so carefully were they guarded.

The house was large and built on a scale to resemble the Shirazi Palace. All the rooms were luxuriously furnished with a total disregard to expense, and there was a magnificent ball-room, lighted by clusters of crystals hanging from the beautifully decorated ceiling, and standing out from the walls on golden brackets. Here the principal ball held during the meeting took place, although there were many dances given in the large ball tent on the ground.

Having inspected his camp, Raja went to the stables, where he found all the horses in excellent condition, none the worse for their journey. Akbar looked the pick of the basket, and he thought the Rajah had an excellent chance of securing the Sunpore Cup. In this race he had Mogul entered, but he did not think him quite equal to taking the measure of Akbar. The Rajah had not arrived, but there was a hurrying to and fro, and a general bustle of many servants, which denoted everything was being prepared. The Rajah's secretary was an Englishman, by name Colin Warbeck, and he was about the only man in the country who professed no liking for Raja Ranji. The reason for this was not far to seek. He was exceedingly jealous of the Rajah's friendship for the planter. When Raja was summoned to Shirazi the secretary was placed in the background ; there was no mistaking the Rajah's preference for his society, and also advice about his stud.

Colin Warbeck prided himself on his knowledge of horses, but he was far behind Raja in this respect. His advice tendered to the Rajah had often resulted in his horses being beaten, on the contrary, when Raja gave his opinion, success generally followed.

The Rajah secured the services of Colin Warbeck in London, and it was through influence of a relative, who held a high position in the India Office, that he obtained the coveted post. He was in many ways suited for it : the duties were familiar to him, and he carried them out admirably ; but when it came to understanding native prejudices and native feelings, he was at fault. He had the very English idea strongly developed, that Britishers were superior to Indians, no matter what their rank might be. Over this feeling he stumbled, and although the Rajah appreciated his services, he never made a confidant of him. He had no dislike for his secretary, but he plainly showed he considered him anything but diplomatic. Having engaged him, he stuck to his bargain, and on the whole was not dissatisfied. It was a sore point with Colin Warbeck, the stabling of Raja's horses at the Rajah's establishment. It gave the planter a pretext for coming to the place as often as he wished, and brought him constantly in contact with His Highness. He made no remonstrance, knowing it would be useless, but he resented it the more for being unable to express his feelings.

He had succeeded, after repeated failures, in getting an English trainer appointed at Shirazi, a man entirely under his control, who carried out his orders faithfully.

James Hythe had been a failure at Newmarket,

but it was more from lack of opportunity than skill. He was clever, and knew how to handle horses, but lacked firmness, and when he had an opinion, it was an easy matter to override it. He had a very good place at Shirazi, and being indebted to Colin Warbeck for it, he did all in his power to please his patron, and like him, he resented Raja's influence with his master.

Raja was too outspoken to attempt to please either of them by agreeing with them when he thought they were wrong. He gave his opinions to the Rajah without hesitation, and it was unfortunate he so frequently differed from Warbeck and the trainer.

As Raja was looking over his horses, Colin Warbeck came in, and not seeing him, passed some disparaging remarks about the Evermore team, adding that he wished they were elsewhere instead of taking up the stalls at the Rajah's stables. When he saw Raja he was astonished, and said—

“I had no idea you had arrived.”

“Probably not, or that I was in the stables, or you would have been more careful in your remarks,” was the reply.

“If His Highness took my advice he would never allow any strange horses in his stables.”

“Then he does not always act upon the words of wisdom which fall from you,” said Raja.

“It would be better for him if he did.”

“As His Highness kindly gave me permission to send my horses here, I accepted his offer.”

“Naturally; I am not complaining of your horses in particular. It is the principle of the thing I object to.”

"He frequently sends his horses to me at Evermore."

"Having a trainer at Shirazi there is no occasion for him to do so, as I have already pointed out."

"It cannot possibly make any difference to you."

"Hythe does not like it ; he thinks it reflects upon his abilities."

Raja laughed as he replied, "I will mention the matter to His Highness, if you wish."

"There is no occasion for it," replied Warbeck hastily, "but I think you understand Hythe's feelings."

"He'll get over it," replied Raja, as he walked out of the stable, after giving some instructions to his head man.

Colin Warbeck scowled at him as he said to himself—

"It will not be my fault if I do not cause a split between you and the Rajah. I hate meddlers."

He knew, however, it would be a difficult, not to say dangerous matter, to try and injure him in the Rajah's eyes.

Harry Lavaux arrived the same night and joined Raja. He had ridden the whole distance, and thought very little of it. Kyban was with the horses in the Rajah's stables.

Hasan, glorious in a new costume, moved about the camp with a complaisant air that amused the Sahib.

"My promoted jamadar is bursting with importance," said Raja. "Look at him."

Hasan was issuing orders in a lordly manner, commanding, directing, threatening, and the servants hurried about quickly.

"He's quite equal to the occasion," said Harry.

"I think he'll be an improvement on Abdool ; he's much younger."

At the mention of Abdool, Raja's face became serious. He wondered how it would be with Krishna during his absence. He felt a strong inclination to send a man to Evermore to see if she was safe ; then he smiled at his foolishness as he remembered this was his first night away. In the middle of the week he would send a messenger, and he could take a present for her at the same time.

"Hasan is a good servant ; I have had him since he was a lad."

"You always have decent fellows about you. I cannot get them. I believe Birdsville beats all the estates round us for rogues and thieves."

Raja laughed as he said—

"When I first came to Evermore the natives lived by thieving, but I soon altered that."

"How did you manage it ? "

"With a good strong whip. When I caught a man thieving I flogged him and settled the matter at once. I daresay you have wondered why there are no police in my village ? "

"I have noticed it. You are fortunate to be without them ; they are a lot of scoundrels."

"I discovered the police were worse than the ryots, so I took to dealing out the same punishment to them."

"Flogged them ? "

"Yes, and they proved arrant cowards. They dare not complain to the magistrate, because they were caught in the act. As no cases came from Evermore they were removed, and I was not sorry to see the last of them."

Next morning they were out early to see the horses exercised. Raja's team was first out, and he rode Gazelle in a spin, accompanied by Harry Lavaux on Kyban.

"We'll do our best over the last mile," said Raja.
"Come along."

They settled down to a hard gallop, and both horses went well. Kyban, however, was no match for the Arab, although he made a good fight of it. As they dismounted, Hythe came up, evidently in a bad temper.

He complained about the conduct of Raja's boys, said they were unruly, and ought to be flogged. Raja was surprised at this, and hardly believed the statement, for he had sent his best boys there, and they were in charge of Hafed, a reliable man. He inquired as to their behaviour, and found the trainer did not make specific charges, but included them in a general condemnation.

"I wish the lot of them were out of it," he said in conclusion.

Raja was inclined to think the boys had been provoked in order to put them in the wrong; and Hythe's last words confirmed this opinion.

"It is probably because you object to their presence, that you try and make matters unpleasant for them," said Raja. "They are my best boys, and behave well at home. However, I will make inquiries and hear their version."

"Do you doubt what I say?" asked Hythe angrily.

"No; but you may have exaggerated."

"I wish all your horses were out of it; there's always a row here when they come."

“If you wish I will remove them and tell His Highness the reason.”

Hythe knew this would make matters much worse, so he said in a grumbling tone—

“I do not wish you to remove them ; what I want is your boys to keep to themselves and not interfere with my fellows.”

“Have they done so ? ”

“Not at present, but that is what will happen.”

“Wait until then, and I will see it does not occur again. Take a word of advice from me. Let my boys alone, and you will have no trouble with them. I know them better than you, and if they are not interfered with I'll guarantee their good conduct.”

Hythe turned to his horses, finding he had the worst of it.

Raja and his friend watched them at work, and he said as Akbar passed—

“He gives that horse too much work. When I had him I found he was always in light condition. I never knew a horse that required less galloping.”

“Do you think Hythe is a good trainer ? ”

“Fair ; he might be better. He's under Warbeck's thumb, and that does not improve him.”

“I dislike Warbeck ; he's a bit of a snob,” said Harry.

“He is unpopular, but I think he makes a good secretary,” replied Raja.

“Do you know what I heard in Calcutta ? ”

“No ; anything about him ? ”

“Yes. Mrs. Margrave told me he was an admirer of Mrs. Kane's and that she threw him over for the Major.”

"I don't blame her," said Raja. "He's the sort of fellow to cause trouble."

"If he falls foul of Major Kane he'll have a bad time."

"There is generally a lot of flirting at Sunpore," laughed Harry. "We shall see if His Highness's secretary has forgotten, or forgiven, his old love."

"That reminds me that last year you were not at all behindhand when spooning time came round. What about the discovery of Harry Lavaux and Mabel Hayson, when the bonfire suddenly blazed up, and they were discovered seated upon one chair instead of two."

Harry laughed heartily as he replied—

"I acknowledge it. Mabel's a jolly girl. I hope she is here this time. I believe you stirred that fire up, Raja. We were not the only couple caught at close quarters."

"Be more careful in future. There may be a bigger blaze this time," said Raja.

CHAPTER X

PARTING WITH DESTINY

THE races were held on alternate days, and before they commenced, Sunpore presented an animated scene. The Rajah arrived with a large party of friends, some of them staying at the house, others in camp. There were hundreds of ladies and gentlemen on horseback, others drove tandems, and various turnouts ; the bands of the regiments played popular music, and many brilliant uniforms mingled with the gay throng. In each camp there was plenty of life and animation. Hundreds of native servants attended to the many demands made upon them, and their picturesque dresses added to the Oriental beauty of the scene. Carriages were early in position round the course, and over the stand floated the flags of various notables. The gorgeous colouring had an effective background in the large green chestnut and mango trees, and the course itself was not destitute of colour, although the ground was hard and dusty. Water, however, was plentiful, and there was an ample supply of carts to moisten the ground. The first day's racing passed off pleasantly, but the Planters' Race, and the Sunpore Cup, were reserved for the second day, when the attendance was always very great. Harry Lavaux was delighted at winning a minor event on Kyban, and said he was perfectly satisfied even if he did

not secure another race. After dinner on the first day Raja was summoned to the Rajah's tent, and threaded his way through the fashionable throngs in order to reach it. As he passed he was greeted on all sides by the many people who knew him and were glad to see him again after a year's separation. He had not seen Mrs. Margrave yet, but Major Kane had invited him to dinner for the following evening.

The band was playing in part of the Rajah's camp, and about a score of men, in magnificent uniforms, were on guard near the entrance. The numerous lounges were lit up with myriads of fairy lights, and a hum of conversation mingled with strains of numerous instruments came from the camp. Raja loved the scene, thoroughly enjoyed its strange and varied beauties, which he had seen many times, and which never palled upon him. Seated under the shamianas he saw lovely women clad in the latest fashions, and tall good looking officers and young subalterns, in their gay uniforms, bending over them, gossiping, flirting, and talking over the events of the day and the sports for the morrow. Some were, he knew, arranging tennis parties, others drives ; some were arranging for shooting parties, and the majority were bent upon seeing the native fair. Everything was bright and gay, there was no room for despondency ; all cares, official and otherwise, were banished for a week, for was not this Sunpore, the liveliest place in India during its racing carnival ?

He arrived at the Rajah's camp, gave his name and was at once ushered into his presence. His Highness, in a wonderful dress, blazing with all kinds of precious stones, was surrounded by several officers

in uniform. When he saw Raja he smiled, greeting him with his usual cordiality, asking his guests to excuse him, as he wished to speak to him for a few minutes.

Colin Warbeck saw them, and made some disparaging remarks to the lady who sat next to him. She happened to know Raja, and her answer did not please him.

“ You run Mogul in the Cup on Wednesday ? ” he asked.

“ Yes, your Highness, such is my intention.”

“ I run Akbar. Have you seen him ? ”

“ I saw him at work last week.”

“ What do you think of his condition ? ” asked the Rajah.

“ He looks well, but he is a horse that does not require much work.”

“ You think Hythe gives him too much ? ”

“ I do not know, but Akbar seems lighter than he ought to be.”

“ Hythe does not please me,” said the Rajah.

“ He is a clever trainer.”

“ That may be, but he treats all horses alike.”

Raja had no desire to injure Hythe ; on the contrary, he would have been glad to do him a good turn.

This, however, was not what the Rajah had sent for him to talk over. He was anxious to learn if he would sell Destiny.

“ Have you thought over what I said about the Viceroy’s Cup ? ” he asked.

“ You mean am I prepared to part with Destiny ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I would do much to please your Highness. You have been very kind to me.”

“It is nothing ; you are my friend.”

“Destiny will, I think, win the Cup this year ; and I am anxious to secure the prize.”

The Rajah smiled ; his face was very expressive, his eyes were bright and piercing. He thought he was about to gain his wish, and was pleased.

“If you will do me this favour I will not forget it,” he said.

“Your Highness has an excellent memory.”

“Sell me your horse, and you will learn what it is to oblige me,” he said.

The temptation was great, for he knew the Rajah would be as good as his word.

“Your Highness wishes to announce you have purchased Destiny, and that he will carry your colours in the Viceroy’s Cup ?”

“I do, here at Sunpore.”

“Will your Highness grant me one favour if I let you have the horse ?”

“Anything you ask I will grant,” he replied, knowing that Raja’s request would not be unreasonable.

“If I sell Destiny to you, will you allow me to train him for the race ?”

“By doing so you confer a favour, I do not grant one. Is there anything else ?”

“Not at present,” replied Raja. “If at any future time I ask a reasonable favour, will you grant it ?”

“You have my word, I will.”

“Then I will sell Destiny to your Highness,” said Raja, and no one knew how much it cost him to say those words. He was forego ing a long expected triumph, for he felt sure Destiny would win the Cup.

The Rajah could not conceal his delight. He grasped Raja's hand, holding it for some time.

"My friend," he said, "you shall know what it is to bestow a favour on Shirazi, but the price is not agreed upon."

"That I leave to your Highness."

"I said I would give a lakh of rupees to win the Viceroy's Cup, and I will be as good as my word."

"It is a large sum ; too large," said Raja. "It will be better for you to give me half the amount now, and the other half on condition he wins the race."

"You are very fair."

"It is sufficient, you are generous. Destiny is worth three thousand pounds, but not more."

"To me he is worth much more if he gratifies my ambition. It is this year I desire to win it more than ever. There will be two English horses and one Australian to beat, and I desire to win for the honour of India."

He understood him. The Rajah loved his country ; his patriotism was great ; he was glad he had the courage to part with Destiny. The victory of his horse in the great race would give him unbounded satisfaction.

"I will do my utmost to win it for you," he said. "I think Destiny will do it. There is one thing, I am afraid your trainer will not like it ; he fancies Akbar will be your horse."

"It matters not at all what he likes or dislikes. He is my servant, and carries out my orders. Akbar will also run."

"In that case it will be a trial of skill between us ; but I have a great advantage in training the better horse."

The conversation was prolonged, and the secretary wondered what His Highness had to say to the planter.

When he left the Rajah informed the officers that he had bought Destiny, and intended to beat all comers in the Viceroy's Cup. They congratulated him, and knew there was every prospect of an exciting race. They were not without hopes, however, that an English horse would beat him. Much as they liked the Rajah they wished to see one of their own set victorious.

Colin Warbeck was ill pleased at this new move. He knew James Hythe had every confidence in Akbar, and hoped to win with him. He was exceedingly annoyed when he learned Raja was to train Destiny, and suggested it would be far better to have the horse at Shirazi. To this the Rajah answered that it was one of the conditions of the sale that Raja should prepare the horse, and expressed every confidence in him.

"I have done it," said Raja, when he reached his camp, and found Lavaux the sole occupant.

"Done what?" asked Harry.

"Sold Destiny."

Harry Lavaux was surprised. He was under the impression that nothing would induce his friend to part with the horse.

"That is news indeed; you have parted with your chance of winning the Viceroy's Cup," he said.

"There's no doubt about that; but I am to have a share in the honour. I train Destiny for it for the Rajah."

"Poor consolation if he wins," replied Harry.

"You must have strong reasons for selling."

“ I have, and I can assure you it was a wrench to part with him. The Rajah is a noble fellow, and I have received nothing but kindness at his hands. To have a powerful friend in case of need is invaluable, and you are aware he is able to render assistance such as few men could afford to refuse. He gave me a big price, and he has capped it with a promise to grant any reasonable request I may make.”

“ By Jove, you are in luck’s way,” said Harry, “ and if you have parted with your chance this year there is no telling what you may do next ! ”

“ You lonely bachelors, what are you doing ? I call it downright selfish, when there are so many charming ladies requiring attention, to idle away your time here. ‘Come out and join us.’ It was Major Kane who spoke, and Raja said—

“ Come in, Major, and deliver your lecture under canvas, it will have more effect.”

“ I have strict orders to take you both back with me,” he said, with a smile, as he shook hands.

“ Mrs. Margrave is simply dying to see you, Raja.”

Harry Lavaux laughed as he said—

“ That’s right, Major, rub it in. He would not believe me when I told him Mrs. Margrave thought a lot of him.”

“ I am sure she holds him in high esteem,” said the Major. “ You cannot refuse the commands of my wife, backed by such a lady, so come along.”

In Major Kane’s camp there were sounds of merriment, and a powerful man’s voice could be heard singing a jovial song.

Seated in various parts of the shamiana, on comfortable chairs or lounges, were a number of guests, and Raja knew many of them.

Nodding to friends he passed over to greet Mrs. Kane, with her husband. He had not met her before, and the first impression he had was that she was an exceedingly pretty woman and dressed with exquisite taste. She welcomed him with a bright smile, saying she was delighted to make his acquaintance as she had heard so much of him from her husband.

"Bruce has told me some lively stories of his hunting and shooting expeditions with you at Evermore," she said. "I am quite looking forward to a visit. A planter's home must be very interesting."

"And very dull, I am afraid," replied Raja, "especially when tenanted by a forlorn bachelor."

"I am sure it can never be dull where you are," she said, regarding him admiringly

"I try to amuse my guests, and they always take me as they find me," he replied.

He bowed and crossed over to Mrs. Margrave. That she was pleased to see him was unmistakable, and she scolded him for not coming before.

"I thought you had quite forgotten poor me," she said. "I knew you were in camp, and expected a call. What have you been doing since we arrived?"

"Putting my camp in order in the hope that Geraldine Margrave will honour it with a visit," he said laughing.

"Raja, I have always been accustomed to regard you as a model of truthfulness," she replied. "I know quite sufficient about your habits to be aware that your camp was in perfect order on your arrival. Did Mr. Lavaux tell you he met me in Calcutta at the Kanes'?"

“ Yes, you made another capture ; he thinks you charming.”

“ Be quiet, Raja ; how frivolous you are growing. So like the other men.”

“ Is not that an improvement ? ”

“ Dear me, no, they are so very much alike that one can hardly distinguish them. You are different.”

“ In what way ? ”

“ Many ways. For instance, you never bother your head about women ; it is quite a relief to meet a man who treats us as equals and not as helpless beings who must always be looked after.”

“ I think most women are capable of looking after themselves,” he answered.

“ So do I, and I fancy I am one ; nevertheless, it is pleasant to be able to rely upon a strong man sometimes. I should have no hesitation in appealing to you if I stood in need of help.”

“ I should be at your disposal,” replied Raja.

“ I know it, and I am glad of it. Have you any idea what I have suffered since my husband died ? ”

“ I think so,” he answered. “ I know how attached you were, and the severance of such strong affections must be a great trial. It was a blow to me when he died, how much greater must it be to you.”

“ Yes, you understand, Raja ; you were always quick with your sympathy,” she replied.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER THE RACES

THEY were saddling the horses for the Planters' Stakes and Raja was attending to Black Island, the horse he decided to run and ride. Harry Lavaux was not far away watching Kyban undergoing his preparation. There were a dozen more competitors owned by various planters. A considerable amount of interest was always taken in this race, keen rivalry existing between the planters, who rode their own horses.

Raja was conspicuous in his light blue jacket and red cap, colours well known on many Indian courses.

"I drew your horse in the Calcutta sweep last night," said Major Kane. "I was afraid at the time I had a non-starter, I thought you were running Gazelle."

"Such was my intention," replied Raja, "but he has gone wrong. I cannot understand it, he seems clean out of condition."

"Do you think Black Island has a chance?"

"Yes, but not so good as Gazelle's would have been; there's Kyban to beat, he won his race easily on Monday."

"Well, I wish you luck, we all like to see the light blue successful."

Mrs. Kane and Mrs. Margrave came up, and they wore his favours.

"We are sporting your colours, so you must be sure and win," said Mrs. Kane.

"We have every confidence in the rider," said Mrs. Margrave.

"Then I must do my best to prove worthy of it," he replied.

Kyban was favourite on account of the good form he had shown, but there was not much to choose between him and Black Island.

Reindeer, Cutaway, and Adrian were most fancied of the remainder, but it was the riders who were backed in preference to the horses.

The distance was a mile, and Raja went away with the lead, followed by Kyban and Reindeer. Harry Lavaux thought his best plan was to keep as close as possible to Black Island, and this he did until the pace set became so strong that he fell back.

The race needs but little description, for Black Island made the whole of the running and won by three lengths. Raja's victory was popular, and he was greeted with hearty cheers. Even the planters who had ridden against him preferred to see him win to anyone else, and as Kyban came in second, Harry Lavaux was well satisfied with his purchase.

The Sunpore Cup, however, was the race of the meeting, and Raja was the only planter riding in it, all the other horses being mounted by jockeys. Akbar was carrying the Rajah's splendid colours, peacock blue, crimson and gold, his jockey being a half-caste named Ben Aysha, attached to the Shirazi

stables. He was a good rider and reliable, a favourite with his master, but not on very friendly terms with Hythe, who always made disparaging remarks about coloured jockeys.

The Rajah's horse looked very fit, almost too finely drawn some good judges thought, but Hythe had his own method of training and would not be dictated to. Mogul was big and powerful, but hardly seemed in the same class as Akbar, still, such was the confidence in Raja that he was well backed.

The Shirazi colours were generally successful at Sunpore, and as the Rajah was the chief supporter of the meeting, no one begrudged him a few wins.

The distance was two miles and the winner of the Cup was generally to be reckoned with later on at Calcutta.

Raja fancied Mogul, but knew if Akbar was thoroughly himself, he would not have much chance of beating him. He was anxious to see how the horse ran in order to get a correct line for Destiny when he tried him with Mogul and Black Island. He determined to ride his horse out, even if he found there was no chance of winning, he could force Akbar to run a true race and make the form reliable. In order to ensure a pace he persuaded Captain Somers to let his jockey make the running on Fair Maid, a very fast mare over a mile.

"I have not much chance of winning," said the Captain, "so I may as well do what I can for you."

"And I will certainly give you due information about Destiny's chance at Calcutta later on if you oblige me," replied Raja.

"Thanks, a good win over the Viceroy's will be

handy, I am never overburdened with money," he answered with a smile.

The Rajah occupied his usual position on the stand, and all his friends were eager to see Akbar successful.

When the flag fell, Fair Maid went off at a tremendous pace, and quickly held a commanding lead. Ben Aysha had strict orders from Hythe not to force the running, and as he did not like being hampered by instructions was not in the best of tempers. When he saw Fair Maid at least a dozen lengths ahead at the end of a mile he felt a strong inclination to disobey orders, but knew if he did the blame, if defeated, would rest upon his shoulders. Still the leader kept going and Raja, determined to test Akbar to the utmost, sent Mogul after her at top speed.

As the light blue jacket passed him like a flash and forged ahead Ben Aysha knew there was no time to lose, orders or no orders. Akbar was going well, and had plenty left in him, so without further hesitation he went after the leaders. This was precisely what Raja wanted, and when Akbar drew up almost level with Mogul he was pleased to see the Rajah's colours.

"There'll be no shirking now," he said to himself, "I'll take good care it is a fight to a finish."

So the spectators thought and there was all the excitement attending a great struggle, already becoming manifest.

Fair Maid was beaten half a mile from the winning post, but her jockey had faithfully carried out his orders and Raja knew the race would be one of the fastest ever run on the course.

Mogul galloped in splendid form, but was unable to shake off Akbar, and they passed Fair Maid running almost neck and neck.

"It's a splendid race," said Harry Lavaux to Major Kane, who replied that it was one of the best he had ever seen.

"Raja rides well, he can beat us all in the saddle," said Harry.

The Rajah was anxiously watching the struggle ; he knew what Akbar was capable of and hoped to see him successful. He had every confidence in his jockey, yet at the same time was afraid of Raja's judgment.

With heads almost level the two horses passed the cheering crowd which lined the straight run. The natives, usually indifferent to such exhibitions, for once in a way caught a touch of the general enthusiasm and the din became deafening.

Raja was riding his best and getting every ounce out of Mogul, as he saw Akbar was not beaten. Ben Aysha, sitting well forward, urged his mount along at top speed, and to his delight found he gained ground. They were within a couple of hundred yards of the winning post, and still the result was in doubt. Neck and neck the well trained thoroughbreds struggled on, every muscle in play, all their glorious strength put out in battle. It was a sight worth seeing, a triumph of well trained bodies, glowing with health, than which nothing is more beautiful when displayed either in man or horse.

Raja was wiry and strong ; in this he had the advantage over Ben, who was small and not over muscular, but endowed with wonderful energy.

They were not quite so unequally matched as they appeared, but undoubtedly the planter was the better able to help his mount at the finish.

Again Mogul drew level and for a moment the pale blue jacket showed in front, it was a last effort on the part of man and horse. Akbar gallantly responded to the call made upon him, and wresting the lead from Mogul, won by a clear length.

It was a tremendous finish, and Mogul was far from disgraced. Raja knew it had been a great race and his purpose was accomplished. He held the winning card in his hand if Destiny proved better than Mogul, and of this he felt sure.

“ You rode a great race, Ben,” he said to the lad, “ I congratulate you on your win.”

The lad smiled, praise from Raja was worth having, he knew what he was talking about.

The Rajah was delighted. If Akbar could beat Mogul in this decisive style there was no reason why he should not win the Viceroy’s Cup after all with him. If Destiny was better than Mogul it looked a very good thing indeed for one of his horses. He was seldom sparing of praise when anyone pleased him, and Ben Aysha came in for his share in addition to a handsome present.

The sport was pronounced a huge success, and in the various camps the performances of riders and horses were the main topic of conversation. Raja and Harry Lavaux dined with Major Kane. It was a splendid night, a cool breeze blowing afforded sufficient excuse to wear becoming wraps, and after dinner a huge bonfire was lighted in the centre of the camp, blazing and crackling as the flames shot into the air, the sparks descending in a golden

glowing fire. Round the great red pile, at a comfortable distance from the heat, sat on chairs, lounges and camp stools, a crowd of well dressed merry guests. The band played martial music, and glee parties sang melodies which sounded weirdly beautiful in the still night.

As the fire gradually died down many couples took advantage of the temporary gloom to indulge in love making and flirtation. Harry Lavaux found Mabel Hayson and secured a couple of chairs in a secluded spot, under the dark shade of the mango trees.

“Do you recollect what occurred last year?” she asked merrily.

“I have a distinct recollection of a particularly enchanting moment which was rudely interrupted when the fire blazed up and disclosed the scene,” he said.

“Then beware there is no repetition to-night,” she said. “I forbid you to move from your chair.”

“It is most uncomfortable.”

“How can you say so?” she laughed. “I am sure you look blissfully happy.”

“It would be impossible to be otherwise in your company,” he replied. “Do you feel cold?”

“Rather, I forgot my cloak.”

Disobeying her orders he rose and placed his coat round her; he then sat down at her feet, saying it would keep the breeze from him.

“What is that song he is singing? Something about ‘at my lady’s feet’ I thought I heard. Most appropriate, here I am and here I remain.”

“On the damp cold ground,” she said laughing. “Poor fellow.”

"I feel no dampness, and the fire of my love forbids cold," he answered.

"Harry Lavaux, you are a fraud," she said. "All planters are flirts, with one exception."

"Name him, oh mighty princess, that I may bow down and worship him."

"Be quiet; please do not talk nonsense; I allude to Raja Ranji, your friend."

He laughed, a thought about Krishna crossed his mind, he wondered what she would have said had Raja brought her to the camp. Krishna with her lovely dusky face and bright eyes, her fawn-like motions, and her alluring form, she would have held her own even in this brilliant company.

"What are you laughing at?" she asked. "Am I not correct?"

"Raja is my friend, he is every man's friend who is worthy to meet him on easy terms. There are very few men like him, but after all he is mortal, some day he must succumb as I have done."

"So you acknowledge you have been conquered."

"You bind me in golden chains, Mabel," he replied.

"Miss Hayson, if you please."

"I prefer Mabel, please let it be Mabel."

"Oh, very well, Harry."

"I never knew my name was half so sweet until this moment," he replied.

"You are incorrigible," she replied. "About Raja, you consider he is likely to meet his affinity some day?"

"Yes, it is our fate."

She pushed him over and he clutched at her chair, which, being of the camp order, gave way and they

both sat laughing on the ground. At this moment the fire blazed out, throwing a brilliant light round the camp.

“Caught again,” said a voice near them, and they saw Raja and Mrs. Margrave laughing heartily.

“A most undignified position, Mabel,” said Mrs. Margrave, smiling.

“He pulled my chair over,” she replied laughing. “He’s a horrid man.”

“He looks a very happy man,” she answered.

“I am, Mrs. Margrave. I assure you that abominable fire has interfered with all my plans,” said Harry.

“There’s one consolation,” said Raja, “it will soon die down again, and you can take up your theme where you left off.”

“Thanks, I have had quite enough of him,” said Mabel.

“The ball-room is open, the band has gone in, are you going to dance?” asked Mrs. Margrave.

“Is it? I am glad. I love dancing. Hurry up, Mr. Lavaux, or we shall miss the valse.”

“I’ll do my best,” said Harry. “Forgive me if I tread on your toes or get entangled in your dress.”

“Leave it to me. I will pull you through,” laughed Mabel, as they hurried away.

“A merry young couple,” said Mrs. Margrave. “How happy they are. Will you dance?”

“If you wish it.”

“I think it is pleasanter out in the open air.”

“So do I,” replied Raja, “I will find comfortable seats.”

He secured two chairs, Mrs. Margrave settled

herself comfortably and he placed a rug across her knees and her cloak round her shoulders, then he sat down beside her.

Judging from the length of time they remained conversing, they had much to say, and were also interested, which is not always the case.

CHAPTER XII

THE NATIVE FAIR

RAJA was a very fair tennis player, and early next morning, with Mrs. Margrave for his partner, had the pleasure of beating Harry Lavaux and Mabel Hayson, who had challenged them, and were rather surprised at their defeat.

“The old ones have beaten the young ones,” said Mrs. Margrave, laughing. “I hardly expected it. You are an excellent player, Raja, is there anything you cannot do ?” she asked, admiringly.

“There are many things,” he replied.

“I have not discovered them. Are you going to the fair to-day ?”

“Yes ; are you ?”

“I hardly know yet, I fancy Major Kane has a couple of elephants engaged.”

“Do you like riding on them ?” he asked.

“It is fun, although the motion always reminds me of a rough and tumble at sea, and there is plenty of bumping in the howdah.”

“Then I hope to meet you there. I am going up to the Rajah’s to look at the horses.”

Later in the day Raja and Harry Lavaux rode over to the fair where there was a dense crowd, all the natives chattering and gesticulating in an excited manner, their varied coloured costumes enlivening the scene.

Some thousands of horses were tethered under the

trees near the fair, coming from distant parts of India, Bokhara and Persia. There were some good animals amongst them, and Raja generally made a few purchases ; on this occasion, however, he did not seem to take much interest in them. His thoughts were elsewhere. When the excitement of his races died down he commenced to wonder if all was well with Krishna ; he became anxious, and very little would have induced him to start off for Evermore. He answered Harry's remarks and comments on the horses in monosyllables and it was easy to see his attention wandered.

"Are you going to buy a horse or two ?" asked Harry.

"Yes I am, when we get into the bazaar," he answered.

Harry laughed as he replied—

"Your thoughts are far away, I am afraid ; I said horses, not dresses."

Raja joined in his merriment, as he replied—

"I was thinking more about dresses than horses. I wonder if everything is all right at home ; I am anxious."

"Don't worry yourself about that," said Harry. "Nothing will happen, and we shall be back in a few days."

"You don't know Paroes as well as I do, he'll stick at nothing if he has a chance."

"There are too many of your people about to give him an opportunity."

"As you say, we shall be home again in a few days. Come with me to the bazaar."

They threaded their way through the throng, stopping occasionally to speak to friends from the

camp who had ridden over in howdahs on the elephants. It was a busy, bright, gay, lively, Oriental scene, brilliant with the life and colour of the glowing east. A variety of merchandise was temptingly displayed on the stalls, stuffs of much value woven with thread of gold, many coloured dresses, gold striped silks of gorgeous eastern colours —orange, green, saffron, amber, pink, silver light as gossamer laces, fans, trinkets, ornaments, bells, robes of cloth of gold, and all manner of precious things for the adornment and beautifying of women. Dazzling to the eyes was the splendid display, and the merchants were keen to sell their wares. Bargaining went on from morning until night amidst a Babel of tongues. One stall attracted Raja's attention. The merchant was of a superior kind to his neighbours and did not thrust himself forward or force his goods upon the public, but rather allowed them to be drawn towards them by the alluring way in which he displayed them. Raja spoke to this merchant, naming his wants, and he produced his choicest wares for inspection. Wonderful and rare were the colours and of much value, their texture being soft and silky, most of them were clinging robes fashioned to enhance the beauty of a woman's form. There was so much that was beautiful he hesitated to choose.

Harry Lavaux watched him wonderingly. He had some idea of the value of the goods the merchant was showing him, and he thought they were far too costly for Krishna. However, it was none of his business, and like a wise man he held his tongue.

Raja seemed engrossed with a scarlet satin dress covered with lace, through which the brilliant colour

shone with an exquisitely softened effect. It was a rich dress, worthy to be worn in a palace. The merchant named the price, Raja demurred, but eventually bought it. Having commenced buying, it appeared difficult for him to leave off. The fever to possess seemed to have caught hold upon him and at last half a dozen dresses of various hues, such as azure, pink, orange, white, sea green and silver, were added to his pile.

The merchant's countenance was a study. He did not smile or seem pleased at having found such a customer; on the contrary Harry thought he appeared loath to part with the goods. He handled the stuffs carefully, caressingly, and sighed when Raja chose the best.

Having bought what he required, he purchased a box and had them packed carefully, then he gave instructions that he would send his jamadar for them. The next stall was loaded with dainty boots of many colours, and here he made more purchases, much to Harry's amusement. Then he bought bracelets and rings, and divers ornaments, amongst others a beautiful golden serpent for use as a waist band, the head to hang down in front.

"I should think that will please her," said Raja.

"You'll spoil her; it's extravagance, Raja, nothing more or less."

"I don't often indulge."

"A good thing too. A few more days like this would lower your balance at the bank."

"There's one thing I must get, a zither."

They hunted about and found what he required, and carried it to the merchant who had sold him the dresses. Here it was placed in the box. The

wily man had not been idle during their absence, for from his hidden stores he had dragged forth into the light more beautiful garments, amongst them a dancing dress of the palest gold, glittering with gems. Raja fastened his eyes upon it greedily; he seemed fascinated by the beauty of the design. As he was handling it carefully a huge elephant with gorgeous trappings stopped in front of the stall. In the howdah were seated Mrs. Kane and Geraldine Margrave. Harry Lavaux drew back into the stall, behind some carpets hanging suspended from the posts, but not before Mrs. Margrave had seen him. She smiled as she thought—

“ Purchasing a present for Mabel, I suppose ; he need not have been afraid of me seeing him.” Then her eyes wandered to Raja, as he stood with the golden dress in his hand, and she changed colour.

What was he doing there of all men, and evidently purchasing what she rightly took to be a dancing girl’s dress ? Had it been any other man, she would have laughed at it, but Raja never did anything without good and sufficient reasons. She wondered if he would buy it, perhaps he was merely admiring its beauty, for she did not deny it was exquisite.

The elephant moved on at the command of his mahout, but not before she saw Raja hand the dress to the merchant, who placed it on one side ; he had bought it, there could be no mistake about that. She was glad Mrs. Kane had not noticed the incident, or she would have made much of it over dinner and round the camp fire, exaggerating in her own way, and throwing out hints as to Raja’s object in making such a purchase. Who was the dress for ?

Mrs. Margrave felt irritated and annoyed that this action on Raja's part caused her uneasiness. Why should it ; what had it to do with her ? She knew that had he been purchasing almost anything else, except that seductive dancing costume she would not have cared. Her opinion of Raja was high, and not to be lightly shattered. He had on many occasions and in divers ways shown her polite attention, and a sympathy for which she thanked him.

Mrs. Kane noticed her abstraction and commented upon it, receiving the time honoured reply that the heat was so great it caused drowsiness and a languid indifference to one's surroundings.

Harry Lavaux thought she had not seen him but she could not well have missed Raja, and at the time he was in the act of making his purchase. It was some satisfaction to know Mrs. Margrave was not given to idle gossip, nor did she comment upon the action of others with a freedom bordering on licence. If Mrs. Kane also witnessed Raja's transactions the story, such as she chose to make it, would be all over the camp by dinner time, and he had some idea how Raja would take it. He heartily hoped the Major's pretty wife had been engaged elsewhere, attracting attention to her charms, which she was never slow in doing.

Raja was unaware Mrs. Margrave had seen him and Harry Lavaux did not enlighten him. In making these costly purchases he had no other idea than to give pleasure to Krishna, who had so far had but few such moments in her life as those she was about to experience when the treasures, dear to every woman, were spread out before her astonished gaze. He pictured her joy and the thought of it

satisfied him ; he had done a generous action and was already reaping the benefit.

The fun of the fair was in full swing, and gathered round a stall covered with rice and grains, sugar and almonds, cocoa-nuts, pastry, and an endless variety of sweetmeats peculiar to the country, he saw several of his stable boys. They had leave of absence, and were enjoying themselves in native style. Raja went to the stall, and when they saw the Sahib they shrank back. He beckoned them and told them to help themselves, which they were nothing loath to do, and crammed the eatables into different parts of their garments. The dealers in elephants were idling against their huge charges under the trees, men and beasts standing in groups, farther on several of the great animals were kneeling down in the water of the stream washing and blowing in thorough enjoyment. Strings of camels were not far away, looking at the passers by with big liquid eyes, and grunting with satisfaction when they were offered a sweetmeat or piece of bread.

In the bird bazaar the noise was deafening. Parrots chattered and shrieked, Java sparrows twittered, peacocks spread their gorgeous tails and extended their wonderful dazzling blue breasts, their colours harmonising with the kaleidoscopic beauty of their surroundings ; quails, bulbul, and talking mynas, by the hundred, and many birds from other climes.

A banging of tambourines, the tones of an out of date fiddle, the clash of cymbals, the ringing of triangles, and the hammering of wooden drums, denoted they were near the camp of the nautch girls.

The word nautch has a fascinating sound, it

suggests everything that is Oriental, weird, and supposed to be fascinating and charming. Alas, that the reality shatters the dream of romance and eastern fable. The Indian nautch girls are the licensed courtesans of the country, and in their ordinary dress, are somewhat demure to look at but in their dance they throw away reserve which gives place to a certain amount of abandon.

Raja and Harry Lavaux had seen many nautch dances on their estates during times of festivity, and were not interested in this sight at the fair. They stopped, however, and looked on. It so happened this batch of nautch girls could posture and dance, and their attitudes and steps were not ungraceful. The native audience appeared to be entranced and delighted in the noise and the movements of the dancers, but to the Europeans, seeing it for the first time, the dance seemed a very dis-enchanting affair. The nautch is all very well to think and imagine about, but the reality is painfully uninteresting.

The dance ceased, the girls panting for breath. The best looking made eyes at the whites, and advances for rupees or coppers, generally the latter, were their reward.

Raja, with his accustomed generosity, gave one of the girls a handful of coins, and she showered down blessings upon the generous burra Sahib.

“Poor devils ; they seem light hearted enough,” he said. “I suppose we see the best side of them, I wonder if they ever think.”

Harry looked at him in surprise as he said—

“Their thinking capacities are small.”

“That is not their fault.”

"It would take generations of enlightening to make them commence to think."

"I suppose you are right ; yet it seems a pity. They must be here for some purpose."

"They are," laughed Harry.

"You can never be serious," replied Raja. "I wonder if Krishna dances like that ; I think not. If she does, I shall burn that dress."

CHAPTER XIII

KRISHNA

GERALDINE MARGRAVE'S curiosity being aroused, she was anxious to find out why Raja had purchased the dress for a dancing girl. It was difficult to discover. He was not likely to talk about it. The usual scenes took place at night round the camp fire, under the shamianas, and in the ball-room. She met Harry Lavaux and asked if he was looking for Mabel Hayson.

"You will find her in the ball-room. She is very fond of dancing," she said.

He thanked her, and was about to hurry in that direction when she said hesitatingly—

"Mr. Lavaux, you will not think me impertinent, or idly curious, if I ask you a question?"

He smiled as he replied—

"I am sure your question will neither be impertinent or idle, but that you have good reason for it."

Had she an adequate reason? That was her difficulty, but as she had broached the subject, she would carry it through.

"I saw you at the fair to-day," she said.

He knew what her question would be as soon as she made the remark.

"I thought I escaped attention," he replied smiling.

"You were not quick enough; there was no occasion to hide."

"No, perhaps not, I stepped behind the carpets, on the spur of the moment, without thought. What is your question?"

"I saw Raja purchasing a dancing girl's dress; it was so unlike anything I expected to find him doing, that I was astonished. I have no right to ask, but I am interested in him. For whom did he buy it?"

Harry was in a fix; either he must prevaricate, or tell her about Krishna, and Raja would not like that, at least he thought so. She noticed his hesitation, and said quickly—

"Do not tell me unless you wish."

"I confess I was surprised at him buying it," he said.

"It was not for one of those nautch girls?"

"Oh dear no," replied Harry, laughing at the mere idea.

"I am so glad, I did not wish to think he was like some men I am acquainted with."

"My dear Mrs. Margrave, I can assure you Raja has not in the least forfeited your good opinion of him by his purchase. I do not feel at liberty to tell you why he bought it, but I am sure if you put the question to him he will answer without any hesitation and not be offended."

Harry thought that on the contrary he would probably be pleased at the interest she took in him, for Geraldine Margrave was a woman any man might have been proud to call friend.

"Thank you," she said. "I will not detain you, I am sure Mabel is anxiously expecting you."

She sat down under the fringed canopy in front of Major Kane's camp, and found herself alone; they were all in the ball-room. Raja passing, saw

her, he hesitated a moment and then joined her.

“ You are quite deserted,” he said.

“ I am tired ; the fair was very tiresome, it was so hot, and there was such a crush.”

“ I did not see you there,” he said.

“ I saw you.”

“ Where ? ” he asked innocently.

“ Guess.”

“ Looking at the horses ? ”

“ Again.”

“ Buying sweetmeats for my boys ? ”

“ Another try.”

“ Among the elephants ? ”

“ No.”

“ I give it up.”

“ You were in the best bazaar in the fair, but I hardly expected it would interest you.”

He laughed. She felt relieved at it as he replied—

“ So you saw me purchasing dresses ? No wonder you were surprised.”

“ Dresses,” she thought, “ I wonder how many ? ”

“ You appeared to have excellent taste.”

“ Which dress did you see me buy ? ”

“ A brilliant gold, covered with gems. I am sure it was beautiful, a dancing girl’s dress, was it not ? ”

“ Yes, but not for a dancing girl.”

“ For a girl who dances, there is a difference ? ” she said.

He saw she was curious, he was much attached to her, and thought it might be as well to explain.

“ I will tell you who I bought the dresses for, and why, if you wish,” he said.

“ I am interested ; please go on.”

He commenced at the beginning, and told her in

as few words as possible about Krishna, and how she was persecuted by Paroes. "There was only one way of saving her, at least so I thought, and that was to make her father bring her to Evermore to enter my service. She is there now, and although I do not think Paroes will dare to molest her in my absence, yet I am anxious to return and see for myself that all is well."

She knew he had done this out of kindness, yet like Harry Lavaux, she saw the danger.

"Is she young?"

"About seventeen."

"Pretty?"

"Exceedingly. I wish you could see her. When am I to be honoured with a visit? Will you come with Major and Mrs. Kane after the races are over? He has some business to transact with the Rajah, and then they are coming on to me. I told him I would ask you."

"I shall be very pleased to accept," she replied. "I am fond of Evermore, and my husband always looked forward to a visit to you."

"Then you will see Krishna and be able to judge for yourself."

"She will be delighted with the dresses."

"I can picture her glee," he said. "She dances, and so I bought that particular dress."

"You are very good to her."

"Am I?"

"Of course you are. Don't you see it?"

"Hardly, I think I am rather selfish, because I know how well they will become her, and I like to see girls well dressed; it makes the place so much more cheerful."

He spoke with an easy confidence, and she knew he was truthful, but he evidently gave no thought to appearances, or to what people might say. She understood him, but it would be different with Mrs Kane.

“ Cannot you get rid of the priest, this man — ? ”

“ Paroës ? ” he said. “ It is difficult. He is cunning, clever, I believe educated. There is some mystery attaching to him, he was in Calcutta for a long time.”

“ Why is he hiding in such an out of the way place ? ”

“ He has good reasons for it, no doubt,” he replied.

“ Could the Rajah help you ? ”

“ I should not like to ask him to interfere, he might not understand my motive.”

“ Do you not think it rather strange——? ” she commenced, then stopped.

He smiled quietly, he was aware of her difficulty.

“ That I should buy such dresses for the daughter of my jamadar. Is that what you mean ? ”

“ Partially.”

“ What else ? ”

“ Will not people think it rather curious to see such a well dressed native girl at Evermore ? ”

She had ventured, and looked to see how he would take it.

“ Do you think it strange ? ” he asked.

“ I understand you, but others may not,” she said softly.

It was a delicate hint that she had confidence in him, was jealous of his name, of what people thought about him. He was gratified for her attitude towards him. He noticed, not for the first time,

what a graceful woman she was, a charming companion and comrade.

“ If you understand me, I care very little what others think.”

“ You value my good opinion ? ”

“ Above all others.”

She felt happy, she commenced to realise that Raja was more to her than any other man, and he was not indifferent to her.

“ I am very glad,” she replied quietly.

“ Do you think I was wrong to take Krishna into my house ? ”

“ Being what you are, no. It would have been very unwise for some men to do it.”

“ She is very fond of me, more attached to me than her father,” he said.

She regarded him earnestly, was it possible he had no idea of the temptation in his way ? His face reassured her, he had spoken quite innocently. She wished with all her heart Krishna was not at Evermore, possibly during her stay there she might induce him to let her take the girl away with her. She determined to broach the subject at an opportune time.

“ What does her father think of it ? ”

“ He is afraid of Paroës, otherwise he is very glad she is in my keeping.”

“ Is she at all like him ? ” she asked. She had seen the jamadar, he was not prepossessing.

“ Not at all,” said Raja, “ there is not the slightest resemblance. I do not believe he is her father.”

“ Is she a half caste ? ”

“ I should say so, her skin is not much darker than mine.”

“ Has he ever hinted at such being the case ? ”

“ No. But he is very silent and reserved. Abdool can keep a secret.”

“ You interest me in the girl, I am quite anxious to see her.”

“ She shall be clothed in her best to do honour to your arrival,” he said smiling.

At the end of the week Raja left Sunpore and made the best of his way back to Evermore. It was a long journey, and he was alone. Harry Lavaux remained behind to come on with the horses, and to see as much of Mabel Hayson as possible. Raja rode at a rapid pace, halting during the intense heat of the day, covering many miles during the night.

His conversation with Geraldine Margrave had enlightened him as to her feelings towards him, and he reciprocated them. He had always admired her, and now she was free he wondered if he ought to ask her to join her life with his. What had he to offer ? He was well to do, not overwhelmingly rich, but he led a quiet lonely life, and Evermore would be a dull place for a woman who had lived much in the world. It was a long way from any large town, and there was no society within reach except at the Rajah’s palace, when he happened to be at Shirazi. The planter’s life suited him, but would it satisfy a clever woman like Geraldine Margrave ?

He smiled as he thought he was looking ahead and regarding his position as secure in her affections. Possibly he misjudged her, the interest she manifested in his life might arise from other feelings than those of love. She expressed her liking for Evermore in no half hearted way, but it was far different to visit the place for a week or two at a

time to remaining there year in and year out with an occasional jaunt to Sumpore or Calcutta.

"Planters ought never to marry," was the opinion he had given to every man similarly situated, who asked his advice. He still thought so, and was certain of one thing, if he asked Mrs. Margrave to be his wife, he would at the same time give up Evermore. It would not be fair to ask her to live there. She would do it, he had no doubt, if she accepted him, but he must not allow her to sacrifice all her pleasures on his account.

Perhaps after all it would be better if they remained good friends and nothing more. Next day, as he drew near to Evermore, his thoughts wandered in a different direction. Krishna would be expecting him; he pictured her smile as she greeted him, he saw her supple, lightly clad figure, her graceful, eager pose. She was very beautiful, and she loved him as a father. His conversation with Geraldine Margrave caused him some qualms of conscience. Was it as a father Krishna showed her affection for him? Evidently Mrs. Margrave did not think so, she smiled at the idea.

Few men were as devoid of self-conceit as Raja, yet he was not blind, and Krishna expressed her feelings in her looks with all the hot blood of her race. He must keep her within bounds. Harry Lavaux said he spoiled her, perhaps he did. He wondered how she would look in her new dresses, how her dancing would please him. She had never seen such stuffs before and would be in raptures over the contents of the box.

He caught sight of the bungalow and pushed on. Everything was the same as when he left it. Abdool

was in the compound and he looked round for Krishna. The jamadar saw him and hurried to the bungalow.

“The Sahib is coming,” he cried.

There was a patter of bare feet and Krishna appeared on the verandah, her eyes sparkling, her frame quivering with excitement.

Raja saw her ; she was safe, and a feeling of relief came over him, then he knew how much his thoughts had been with her during that week at Sunpore. He waved his hand to her, a most undignified proceeding on the part of the Sahib to his servant. Krishna waved back, a liberty her father wondered at her taking, and scowled his displeasure.

Abdool saluted him, took his horse as he dismounted, and walked it to the stables.

“Everything all right ?” asked Raja.

“Yes, Sahib, everything.”

He hurried on to the verandah. Krishna stood with downcast eyes, casting an occasional glance towards him. She looked exceedingly lovely, clad in a white robe of thin silk tied loosely round the waist with a yellow band. Her hair was gracefully coiled on her head in a black wavy mass, she had a trick of doing it no other woman he had seen about Evermore possessed.

“Krishna, you are glad to see me ?” he said eagerly.

She crept closer to him, her brown feet peeping out beneath the white of her gown. She nestled at his side, raised her large liquid dark eyes to his and said—

“It has been like years since the Sahib went away.”

Raja laughed joyously. He felt strangely elated ; a peculiar feeling of rest and pleasure stole over him. He stroked her hair as her head leaned against his arm, then he looked furtively round, a very unusual proceeding on his part. There was no one about, he did not see a fierce pair of eyes fixed upon them, but Lisa, the old Hindoo woman, was watching behind the lattice, rage knawing at her heart.

“ Krishna.”

She looked up, her face glowing with love and happiness.

Raja clasped her in his arms, almost fiercely, and kissed her, once, twice, many times.

CHAPTER XIV

A BEWITCHING DANCER

RAJA felt dissatisfied with himself, he had given way to an uncontrollable impulse, he ought not to have kissed Krishna, it was not fair to her. The knowledge that she returned his embraces troubled him, there was nothing fatherly about their feelings on the occasion.

Krishna was not at all shy or bashful, but very happy. Whatever the Sahib did was right ; she belonged to him, and if he wished to kiss her so much the better. She liked it, and it was not her duty to resist. She wondered at her good fortune, and with a shudder thought how it would have been with her had Paroes been in the Sahib's place. She knew now what a man's embrace meant, and hated the Brahmin with a deadly hate.

Lisa had seen what happened and judged it according to her lights. She drew her own conclusions and blamed Krishna for a forward girl. If the opportunity came, she meant to do her harm. Paroes would find in her a willing tool. She loved the Sahib with tigerish ferociousness; if he did not save himself from the snares and wiles of Krishna she would do it for him. Her eyes flamed with rage, as Krishna approached her, and the girl started back afraid.

“ What is the matter ? ” she asked. “ Are you not glad the Sahib has returned ? ”

“ What is he to thee ? ” she hissed, a rattle in her throat like a snake.

“ He is the Sahib, I am his servant.”

“ Take care ; the Sahib is not for such as thou.”

Krishna tossed her pretty head, she felt her woman’s power within her. The Sahib loved her, what mattered Lisa and her ill words ?

The old woman shook her fist at her and said—

“ Sorrow will haunt the path you tread, but it shall not touch him. I have tended him in sickness, I have cared for him many years, beware lest evil befall thee.”

Had Lisa seen them on the verandah ? What if she had, the Sahib would protect her. Krishna felt sorry for the old woman, whose rage betokened her love for Raja, and anyone who loved the Sahib had her good will.

The bullock carts arrived, Hasan in charge, and Raja ordered the box to be brought into his room. He shut the door, drew the blinds, and opened it, taking out the dresses carefully and displaying them to the best advantage on chairs in various parts of the room, the yellow dress he left in the box. They looked even better here than on the merchant’s stall in the bazaar, he flattered himself his choice was good.

Opening the door he called Krishna. She was always at hand and came quickly. She entered the room and he closed the door again.

“ Look, Krishna, what do you think of your dresses ? ”

She was bewildered by the dazzling display. She had never in her life seen such beautiful things, much less ever dreamt of possessing them.

“ For me, all for me ? ” she exclaimed in raptures.
“ Yes, do you like them ? ”

She passed from one to the other, touching them carefully, gazing first at one then at another, in amazement. She could not express all she felt, but as he watched her he understood and knew she was overwhelmed with delight.

She took up the brilliant scarlet covered with lace, and let it fall in folds in front of her. He saw how enchanting she would look in it, and realised vaguely that her appearance would startle his visitors ; he wondered what Mrs. Margrave would think.

Yielding to a sudden impulse Krishna put the dress on the chair again, ran over to him, and threw her arm round his neck.

“ How very, very good you are to me,” she said.

He put his arm round her waist, drew her to him, and kissed her again and again.

“ I am so glad you are pleased, you are a good girl and deserve them, but there is something more.”

He lifted the lid of the box and handed the dancing girl’s dress to her.

Krishna gave a cry of delight. The gems sparkled on it, the gold lace glittered as she turned it about.

“ You told me you could dance. So I bought it for you. When will you dance for me ? ”

“ When the Sahib wishes.”

“ Go and put it on, then return,” he said.

She obeyed him as she always did. Fortunately, Lisa was busy in the kitchen and did not see her.

The dress fitted her perfectly and enhanced her dark beauty ; in the mirror she saw what a change had come over her. She posed herself before it,

threw her head back, her hair which she had undone, and combed out, swept down to her feet in black waving masses. She was indeed entrancing, bewitching, captivating. Practising a few steps, she made ready to return to him, mightily pleased with herself, wondering what he would think of her.

Raja was sitting down when she entered. When he saw her he started to his feet with an expression of bewildered amazement and delight. He had never imagined the dress would work such a transformation. She looked like a fairy princess, her beauty was enhanced a hundredfold, and Raja was speechless at the sight.

She saw his astonishment and laughed. Her blood was hot, her whole being thrilled with love for this man, who had done so much for her, not merely clothed her in fine dresses, but given her another being. She would repay him as best she knew how.

Poising herself lightly on her bare feet she commenced to dance. Her every movement was full of sinuous grace, her body fell in graceful curves as she willed, her finely moulded arms above her head one moment, then swept almost to the floor as she twirled round. She danced quickly without tiring, and he watched her as though under a spell. She stopped, flung back her head, and her hair brushed behind her, in a moment she was upright again, her limbs moving without an effort, her bosom heaving, her eyes dancing with joy in her movements. Raja had never seen anything like it, where had she learned to dance in this wonderful way ?

When she ceased he bade her sit down and rest, still lost in a maze of thoughts at what he had seen.

"Krishna, no one ever danced like that, it is marvellous," he said. "Where did you learn?"

"I did not learn, I have always danced since I was a little child; it is natural to me."

"How beautiful you are!" he said.

"I am glad the Sahib loves beautiful horses, beautiful gems, everything beautiful."

He knew she was glad because he was pleased, everything she did was for him, she had no thoughts that were not his.

"Shall I dance again?"

"Not now, you can take the dresses to your room and try them on. I have visitors coming from Singapore, you will dance for them."

"If the Sahib wills."

"You must dance as you did just now."

She smiled, it was not the best she could do; if there were English ladies she would show them how to dance.

"Which dress shall I put on?"

"Anyone you like," he replied. She placed them in the box and he helped her with it into her room.

Raja wandered about the compound, wondering what would be the end of it all. He had placed Krishna on a pedestal, it would ill become him to let her fall off, and he had no such intention. When he suggested her coming to Evermore, he had not contemplated this situation, it had its embarrassments. He smiled as he pictured the Major and Mrs. Kane, and Mrs. Margrave, watching her dancing.

Catching sight of old Lisa he thought it as well to explain matters to her. She listened in silence with a grim look on her shrivelled face.

"The Sahib dresses the girl in fine clothes, she will be a doll," said Lisa.

"She will not always wear them," he replied.

"The girl is useless, she cannot work."

"I do not wish her to work."

"If she does not work it will go ill with her when the Sahib has done with her."

"Hold your tongue, woman, I will not have you speak so ; she is in my service, do I ever allow any of my people to fall on evil days ? "

She shook her head as she said—

"It will work ill for the girl."

"It shall not."

"Destiny is marked out for such as she."

"She is to me as a daughter, I am alone."

Lisa looked hard at him, she always accepted what he said—

"The jamadar's daughter is not of the race of the Sahib's child," she answered.

"Is she his daughter ? Find out for me."

If there was one thing more than another Lisa delighted in it was solving a mystery ; even her dislike for Krishna was not sufficiently strong to outweigh this.

"The Sahib thinks she is not Abdool's child ? "

"I said, find out."

"It is your will."

"It is, and I will give you money if you succeed."

Lisa was greedy, a miser, she had her hoard in a safe place ; money was her god, but little of it found its way to the temple.

"The Sahib shall know what he wishes, Abdool is a fool."

She spoke contemptuously, and he said—

“ You can draw his secret from him if he possesses any.”

She said it was easy, and was cunning enough to concoct a story if she found nothing to her hand. There was every prospect of Raja hearing something remarkable about Krishna, especially if Abdool had nothing to tell. Lisa was not naturally a wicked hag, but lying was a part of her and would never be eradicated. She saw no harm in inventing a story for his benefit if it increased her hoard. She began to think the Sahib was not the strong man she imagined, or he would not permit a chit of a girl to overcome his resolution. Still, she was devoted to him, and if he must have Krishna—well, so let it be.

Now it so happened that on this particular night Lisa was seized with a devout fit and went to the temple of Shiva. No one molested an ugly old woman and she was perfectly safe alone. Her ancient form was well known in the villages, where she was regarded with a certain amount of respect as the head of the Evermore household. Lisa could distribute food if she willed, and this was not to be despised in a country where men lived on a handful of rice a day. For her age she was active and reached the temple in less time than might be imagined.

Paroës saw her and determined to make use of the opportunity. He spoke kindly to her, receiving her small offering with a profusion of thanks which did not deceive her in the least. She had not much acquaintance with the temple, and he showed her things she had not seen before.

Then he questioned her as to Krishna, telling her

a wonderful story of the god, how he had been commanded to present the girl to him through himself, impressing upon her that whatever happened would be for her eternal benefit, all of which Lisa knew was humbug. It suited her purpose to believe him, or pretend to do so, and Paroës, cunning as he was, was deceived by her.

Cautiously he approached her, asking her to assist in the good work and obtain the girl for him.

“How can an old woman do this?” she asked.

“Try and persuade her to come here with you to worship.”

“She does not trust me, she belongs to the Sahib.”

Paroës ground his teeth and raged at her words.

“She is not for the outcast, the son of the devil, she is for the god, for Shiva’s priest.”

“That may be, at present she is the Sahib’s,” said Lisa, teasing him and glorying in his rage.

“We must get her away—Abdool, you and I,” he said.

“It will be difficult.”

“It is possible?”

“I do not know.”

“Listen to me,” said Paroës. “I have money and if you get the girl for me I will pay you well.”

Lisa’s eyes gleamed with covetousness. She thought it possible to draw money from both sources, a double gain.

“He will go to Calcutta soon, then will be our time,” said Paroës.

“There will be terrible happenings when he returns, if she is not there.”

“No matter, she will be mine.”

“ Are you not afraid ? ”

Paroes laughed uncomfortably as he replied—

“ I am a priest ; no one dare strike me down.”

“ She would kill you.”

“ The girl, I do not fear her.”

“ She is a tiger.”

“ I will tame her.”

“ The tiger is not tamed.”

“ You will help me ? ”

She looked at his evil face, and callous though she was, shuddered at the fate that might be in store for Krishna if she was in his power. It might be possible to obtain money from him and render him no help.

He fancied she hesitated and said—

“ I will give you money now if you will help me when the time comes.”

“ I am very poor,” she wailed.

He left her standing at the temple gates and went inside ; she pushed open the door, wondering where he kept his money, but could not see him in the gloom.

Hearing his steps she hurried back to the gate. He gave her five rupees, which she eagerly grasped, not having expected so much.

“ You will help me ? ”

“ If it is in my power,” she answered, but as she hurried homeward, she determined Paroes should get very little for his money. The Sahib would give her much if she told him what the Brahmin intended doing when he was absent in Calcutta.

CHAPTER XV

RAJA SURPRISES HIS GUESTS

HARRY LAVAUX was the first to arrive from Sunpore with the horses, and the same week came Major and Mrs. Kane, Geraldine Margrave, and Mabel Hayson, she having been persuaded by Harry to join the party.

“What will Raja say?” she asked.

“He will be delighted to see you. I will tell him on my arrival you are coming”

“What a lovely place!” said Mrs. Kane enthusiastically. “And you are a bachelor; how selfish of you to keep it all to yourself.”

Raja laughed as he replied—

“For a man it is not lonely, for a woman—she would die of *ennui*. ”

“Not with you for a companion.”

He did not like the suggested compliment, or the way in which it was given. He made no reply, and she felt rebuked—a thing she was not accustomed to. She accepted it as a challenge, knowing her fascinations were many, she meant to have her revenge—amicably.

Krishna had opportunities of seeing the ladies before they saw her. She found places of concealment from which she obtained a good view. It was a preliminary skirmish to discover the enemy, and she reluctantly acknowledged they might be for-

midable. They were of the Sahib's race. What was she to them ? A glance at her pier glass answered her, and she smiled.

It was Amy Kane she decided was the prettiest, therefore the more dangerous. She did not know she was the Major's wife, nor would it have made any difference if she had.

Raja wondered where she was, but did not send for her : there was ample time for that. Her dancing would come as a pleasant surprise after dinner.

"The Rajah has guests at the Palace," said the Major. "He intimated he would send over to ask us all to pay him a visit."

"Have you been to Shirazi ? "

"No."

"It is a wonderful place : well worth seeing."

"I have been in several palaces, and some of them are marvels. Shirazi is a good neighbour ? "

"Very ; we are friends, that is the principal reason I let him have Destiny. I was very reluctant to part with him."

"Is he likely to win the Viceroy's Cup ? "

"I hope so ; he is better than Mogul, I fancy."

"And Akbar ? "

"I shall be able to tell what chance he has with him when I try him with Mogul and Black Island."

They were walking to the stables, and the ladies were seated on the verandah in the shade, Harry Lavaux entertaining them. It was not until after dinner that Geraldine Margrave said, "Where is Krishna ? We have seen nothing of her yet."

"I am preparing a surprise for you. I want you to see her dance ; I think you will be surprised."

"Will she wear the dress ? "

"The one you saw me purchase? Yes; and it becomes her well."

The others were not aware of the presence of Krishna at Evermore. Mrs. Margrave had not named it.

The verandah at Evermore was wide and spacious, and at night was illuminated with lanterns and lamps, with a variety of coloured shades. They were sitting there after dinner enjoying the calm quiet of the Indian night.

Presently Raja hinted at the surprise he had in store for them, and Mrs. Kane exclaimed—

"How delightful. Do let us see this prodigy you have discovered. I have never witnessed a nautch dance."

"You will not care for it when you do," replied Raja; "and you will not see one to-night; it is something very different: far more graceful. She is my jamadar's daughter, and has never seen a real nautch girl in her life."

"I am all expectation," she said. "Please send for her."

Raja went into his room and passing through summoned Krishna, who was ready and waiting. He spoke a few words of encouragement, looking at her admiringly, and then returned, bidding her follow in a few minutes. He turned up the lamp, and there was a blaze of light.

Krishna was not afraid. She nerved herself to dance her best, to show the English ladies what she could do. A parting glance at the mirror, and she was ready. Entering Raja's room she ran lightly across and darted out into the brilliant light, a dazzling vision of Eastern splendour.

Exclamations of surprise and admiration greeted her ; they were astounded at her beauty and grace.

“ How lovely she is,” murmured Mrs. Margrave.

“ Exquisite,” said Mabel.

Mrs. Kane made no remark. She envied the girl her loveliness. As for Major Kane, he turned to Raja and said—“ Where did she spring from ? Surely she cannot be old Abdool’s daughter ? ”

“ He claims her,” replied Raja, “ but it seems impossible. You can commence your dance,” he said to Krishna.

She waited a moment, then sprang lightly into position. The golden dress with its glittering gems flashed and scintillated in the light as she moved swiftly round. Her black hair was down ; on her wrists she had bangles, and anklets above her feet, fitting tight. The dress fell in graceful folds, clinging to her body and limbs as she swayed to and fro. It was a different dance to the one Raja had seen, more voluptuous, filled with an Oriental sensuousness that came natural to her, yet with no taint of coarseness or suggestiveness. It was a living moving poem, a dream of delight, a momentary glimpse of an Eastern tale full of colour, and glowing with beauty. Her black hair, as she swung her body, coiled round her waist, then with a sudden movement regained its natural position. Her dark eyes danced in unison with her movements ; they sparkled with merriment, in harmony with the gems. Bending her body backwards until her head almost touched her hips, she whirled round in a giddy circle, her feet moving quickly, noiselessly, her limbs outlined beneath her dress, her arms keeping time with her graceful motion.

They watched her in silence, too surprised to express their astonishment ; entranced by her beauty and the subtle charm of every pose of her body.

She stopped suddenly, disappearing as quickly as she appeared, followed by a burst of applause, genuine and sincere.

“ Marvellous ! ” exclaimed Major Kane. “ Raja, you are an extraordinary man. You generally have everything of the best. I never saw such dancing ; it is wonderful.”

Geraldine Margrave had not thought of this. To her Krishna was perhaps a superior half caste ; but the reality alarmed her. The girl was beautiful, fascinating, a dangerous enchantress for Raja to have at Evermore. She was anxious to speak to him alone : she hardly knew why

Mrs. Kane expressed her delight in no measured terms, and Mabel Hayson was in raptures. Krishna did not appear again that night, but she was almost the sole topic of conversation until they retired. There was a freedom from restraint at Evermore. Visitors did as they pleased, and it was no uncommon occurrence to find someone on the verandah during the night when it was very hot.

Raja did not send for Krishna ; he wished to be alone, to think over it all, to analyse his feelings towards her ; take himself severely to task, if necessary.

Geraldine Margrave was restless, the dancing of Krishna came as a revelation. She wondered what influence the girl had over Raja. Her room felt close and stifling. After a moment's hesitation she slipped on her dressing gown, and went on to the verandah, on the opposite side to where Raja sat.

She fancied she was alone, and walked up and down slowly, pondering over the occurrences of the evening.

Raja, who was quick of hearing, noticed the sound of some one moving, and thinking it might be Krishna, went round to the side of the bungalow. As she turned she saw him, and gave a slight start. He was not surprised to see her ; it was not unusual for visitors to leave their rooms during the night.

“I am afraid you find it close indoors,” he said.

“I was restless, and thought perhaps a walk would do me good.”

“Do you mind me remaining ? We shall be company. Will you sit down in front, it is more pleasant.”

She walked round with him, and seated herself in a chair ; he did likewise.

“Well ?” he said questioningly, “what do you think of her ?”

“I was surprised. I had never imagined her to be so graceful and beautiful. Her face is exquisite.”

“She is a very pretty girl, not much resemblance to Abdool.”

She laughed as she replied—

“She cannot possibly be his daughter ; it is absurd.”

“I am afraid he is the only father she will ever know.”

“Except yourself.”

“Yes, except myself.”

“Raja, I am an old friend ; you are playing with fire, it is dangerous,” she said earnestly.

He did not deny it. How could he, after what had taken place ? In Geraldine Margrave’s society he always felt a keen sense of pleasure ; she under-

stood him, was not afraid to speak her mind. She possessed all the power a cultivated pure English-woman always has over a man—a precious gift which should be held dear above all things, and not lightly parted with.

“When you brought her here, did you realise what you were doing ?” she asked.

“No.”

“Do you realise it now ?”

“Sometimes ; but I think you exaggerate the danger.”

“The mere fact that you acknowledge there is danger proves I am right. Is it just to the girl ?”

“She is out of danger here ; if you knew what threatened her you would agree with what I have done.”

“Supposing she could be provided with a home where she would be perfectly safe, would you let her go ?”

“That is out of the question.”

“I will take her under my protection if you wish.”

“You !” he exclaimed.

“Is there anything strange about it ? She would be very useful to me as a companion.”

“I think you do not understand the difficulty. She has never been far away from here. I do not think she would go.”

“May I ask her ?”

He hesitated. She noticed it, and sighed.

“If you really wish it,” he said.

“Raja, be candid with me ; it is you who do not wish her to go.”

He could not deny it, but he was angry because such was the case.

"I am not surprised," she said, quietly. "You live a lonely life. She has come into it. The spell will last for a time, but not for very long. In justice to the girl you ought to send her away."

"Perhaps you are right; but I assure you no harm will happen to her," he added hastily.

"I know you are a strong man; that you have more self-control than most men. You believe I am your friend?" she asked.

"Indeed I do."

"Then let me have Krishna. I will be very kind to her; I think I can teach her to love me."

"You are very good," he said.

"Not at all, I shall be very pleased to have her."

"Then you may ask her," he said.

"You think she will refuse?"

"Yes."

"If she remains here will there be no danger when you are away in Calcutta? Supposing I take her there, and if she dislikes it, she can return with you."

He seemed to like the idea. He knew if she remained at Evermore during his absence there might be danger.

"If I say it is my wish she must go with you, she will obey."

"Then it rests with you: the responsibility will be yours. I hope you are not offended with me?"

"You cannot offend me," he said simply.

Geraldine knew how much those words implied, more than he was aware of, and her heart beat fast with hope. His attachment to Krishna she understood. The girl's loveliness appealed to his loneliness at Evermore; he wished to shield her, and the consequence of her presence in his house was to create

a feeling of romantic interest in her. That she could forgive ; it did not necessarily mean his feelings towards herself would change. Intuitively she recognised that when he was in her presence he was contented, conversed familiarly with her, showed her his innermost thoughts without reserve. In time he would come to love her, if she so desired ; she was sure of it. He was not far removed from that feeling now. She had not been quite certain up to this time whether she really loved him, and wished him to return her affection. She no longer hesitated, Raja was very dear to her : how dear she had not known until she saw Krishna. Poor Krishna !

CHAPTER XVI

GERALDINE QUESTIONS KRISHNA

“ KRISHNA, my child, I wish to speak to you ; come here and sit at my feet.”

She obeyed willingly. Geraldine Margrave was her favourite already. She had a quick discernment.

“ You have never been away from your village, or Evermore ? ” she asked by way of commencing.

“ No, I am happy here.”

“ Have you never wished to see more of the world, the beautiful cities, the life others live ? It is so different to anything you can imagine.”

“ You have seen it all ? ”

“ Not all ; far from it,” she answered, smiling ; “ but I know many people, and many cities in India and England.”

“ Tell me about them, please.”

Mrs. Margrave tried to interest her, succeeding admirably. She gave her a glowing description of the Viceregal Court, told her of the gay life of cities and camps, the military splendour of the Empire, the amusements and relaxations of society. Krishna listened wonderingly, it was all very strange, a glimpse of another world of which she knew nothing.

“ You would love to see all these sights ? ” she asked.

“ Oh, yes, but I never shall.”

“ You may, if you wish ; many of them.”

Krishna looked at her with her big dark eyes, questioning her. “ How can I see them ? ”

“ The Sahib is very good to you, and he would like you to see more of the world. I am a lonely woman, and want a companion, a bright, pretty girl like yourself. I think we should be very good friends indeed, and that you would grow to love me.”

“ Does the Sahib love you ? ” she asked innocently.

Geraldine Margrave turned away her head, and a faint flush spread over her cheeks.

“ He is a very great friend of mine,” she replied hastily. “ We were talking about you the other night, after you danced so well, and he thought you might like to see some great city, and all the strange people. I promised to take care of you if you would go with me to Calcutta, and be my companion, only for a time, until you had a sufficient change ; then, if you preferred, you could return to Evermore.”

“ Leave the Sahib ? ” she asked.

“ For a time. He will be in Calcutta for the races.”

“ I cannot leave him ; I am his servant.”

“ If he wishes it you will go ? ”

“ He does not wish it.”

“ I think he does.”

“ He would not send me away, he is too kind. I should die if he sent me away ”

Mrs. Margrave put her hand on her head and said gently—

“ You would not die, Krishna ; you would be a good girl and the change would make you more beautiful.”

“ The Sahib loves beautiful things. Perhaps that is why he loves you,” said Krishna.

"Loves me!" said Geraldine. "How do you know that?"

"I can tell by his eyes when he looks at you. I know him so well; I can read every look."

"And you think he loves me?" she said softly.

"Yes, and he loves me too."

This was a check on Mrs. Margrave's joyous feelings.

"He is a second father to you."

"That is what he says," replied Krishna, smiling.

"You love him better than your own father, Abdool?"

"It is different; they are not alike," said Krishna, naively.

Geraldine laughed; the girl's answer amused her.

"No, they are very unlike."

"Abdool is old and ugly; the Sahib is young and handsome. I do not like old men."

"The preference is not peculiar to you."

"Do you like old men?" asked Krishna, who did not understand her.

"I know some very nice old men—soldiers who have fought for their country—brave, noble old men, and I like them."

"But not so well as the Sahib?"

"Perhaps not; it is because I am such a friend of the Sahib's he thought you might be willing to go with me."

"I cannot leave him, he is lonely. He would have no one to dance for him, or wait upon him."

"It will not be for very long, and I will love you, Krishna, for his sake," she added quietly.

A bright idea struck the girl. She looked up into Geraldine's face and said—

"We both love him; why do you not stay here and live with him, then I could wait upon you?"

"I cannot possibly do that," she replied smiling.

"Why not? the Sahib is rich; he will be pleased to have you."

It was hopeless to try and explain to her.

"If he wishes you to go with me, will you obey?"

"Yes; but he will not." She was silent for some time, and then asked—

"If I go with you will you return and stay here always with him when I come back?"

"He would not wish it."

"I will ask him," said Krishna.

"No, no, my child, you must not do that; indeed, you must not. I shall not love you if you do," said Geraldine in some trepidation.

"Why not? If you love him it will be better so. You do love him?"

"I said we were old friends," said Geraldine.

"I know you love him; I can tell by the way you speak. I know by my own feelings."

"You love him very much?" she asked.

"The Sahib is my life; if he goes out of it I die."

This was her simple faith—love, nothing but love—without it she did not care to be.

Geraldine Margrave was touched at the girl's devotion. Here was a nature capable of making great sacrifices.

"You would not mind the Sahib loving me?" asked Geraldine.

"No; I can love him, and love you; why cannot he love two people?"

"You do not understand, little one, and I cannot explain."

“ It is very easy.”

“ Indeed, no ; it is difficult.”

“ Not to love ? ”

“ I did not mean that.” She had not advanced far with her at present.

“ Shall I ask the Sahib if he wishes me to go away with you ? ”

“ Yes, that will be the best,” replied Geraldine relieved.

“ Then I will do so. You will see I am right.”

“ How ? ”

“ He will bid me remain.”

Later in the day Krishna was alone with Raja.

“ I have been speaking with the lady,” she said.

“ Mrs. Margrave ? ”

“ That is her name ; she bid me ask you a question.”

“ And what is it ? ”

“ Whether you desire me to go to Calcutta with her ? ”

“ Do you wish to go ? ”

“ I do not ; I will not leave you, unless you bid me go.”

“ You will see many wonderful sights in Calcutta.”

“ She told me many wonderful things. It must be very grand.”

“ It is, and I should like you to see it all. You like Mrs. Margrave ? ”

“ Yes, she is good and kind, and there is something else.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ I also love her because she loves you,” said Krishna.

"You are a foolish girl," he replied. He was at a loss for something better.

"We both love you, and therefore we love each other," said Krishna.

"How do you know she loves me?" he asked.

"Her eyes tell me; I know. And there is something else."

"You are a strange girl; go on."

"You love her," said Krishna.

He started, and said angrily—

"You did not tell her that?"

"Why not, it is true?"

"Confound it all; here's a nice predicament to be in," he thought.

"There's one consolation, she would not take much notice of her talk." Then he asked himself, was she right—was it true?

"Krishna, you must not let your feelings carry you away. You must not say such things to Mrs. Margrave, or anyone. It is not right."

She looked surprised; sorry for a fault she did not understand. Was love a thing not to be talked about? She felt she would never tire of telling others of her love for the Sahib. To her it was everything—her whole being—a thing to be worshipped through him. He forbade her to speak about it, and she wondered at it.

"The Sahib knows I love him?"

"Yes; and am I not your other father?"

"But that is not what I mean. Abdool is my father, but I do not love him as I love the Sahib."

Evidently dangers and difficulties beset him. It would be better for her to go with Mrs. Margrave;

he cast about for some way to persuade her without causing her pain.

“ I know you love me, Krishna,” he said, “ and because of your love you will do as I wish. Listen, I have to go to Calcutta ; it is the will of the Rajah, and must be obeyed. When I was at Sunpore I was unhappy, because I was always wondering if you were safe : if Paroes had dared to come here. I shall be at Calcutta for a long time, and I do not wish to leave you here. I cannot take you with me, but if you go with Mrs. Margrave you will be safe, and I can see you when I am there. That is why I wish you to go, so that there will be no danger from Paroes.”

“ And when the lady comes to live at Evermore with you I shall be here also ? ”

“ She will not come to live here.”

“ It is written so ; she will come. I know it,” said Krishna.

It was of no use trying to convince her otherwise, so he said—

“ You can return to Evermore if you wish.”

“ Then I will go with her.”

“ That’s a good girl. You will be very happy,” said Raja, hardly knowing whether he was glad or sorry he had convinced her.

Krishna told Lisa what had happened, that she was to go to Calcutta with Mrs. Margrave.

The old woman’s face betrayed neither pleasure nor displeasure at the announcement.

“ The Sahib orders you to go ? ” she asked.

“ Yes.”

“ When ? ”

“ I do not know, but soon.”

"It is well for you."

"I am to return," said Krishna.

"We shall see," said Lisa. She had her own opinion, which was, that Krishna would find the attractions of Calcutta too great to be left behind for Evermore.

She saw her opportunity to get more money from Paroes, and again went to the temple.

Eagerly he asked her if she had any news, and she aroused his impatient curiosity without gratifying it.

"I have much to tell if it is made worth my while," she said.

This was a direct hint, and Paroes cursed her for a thieving hag ; but he gave her more money, being the only way to obtain what he desired.

"Krishna is to leave the bungalow," she said.

"Then he is tired of her?"

"No ; she leaves with a lady—an English lady—for Calcutta."

Paroes saw her slipping from his grasp, and his face was convulsed with passion.

"When does she go?"

"I do not know?"

"You must find out."

"She will return ; it is only for a time."

"She must not go. I will make Abdool bring her here."

Lisa smiled provokingly, her withered features wrinkling up like parchment.

Paroes shook his fists and cursed her.

"You mock me," he cried. " Beware ! "

He shook her violently, and she stumbled, narrowly avoiding a fall. The money clinked on the ground, she knelt down and clutched it eagerly.

“ I will help you no more,” she said, shuffling away.

He was after her directly ; caught her by the arm, pulling her back. He dragged her to the temple gates and pushed her through, then forced her up the steps into the building. He shut the door and barred it.

Lisa was now thoroughly frightened. What was he about to do ? She had heard horrible tales about the cries and sounds issuing from the temple, and her blood froze in her veins. Would he kill her ?

Paroës saw her terror, and laughed.

“ It is not safe to mock a priest,” he said. “ Follow me.”

She shrank back, but he laid hold upon her, dragging her forwards to the front of the hideous idol.

“ Beware the wrath of Shiva,” he said.

Then Lisa witnessed the same sight that had terrified Abdool into submission. The great eye shot forth fire, the mouth hissed steam, the noise was deafening ; the whole appearance of the god devilish.

With a cry of fear Lisa sank down trembling in every limb. The priest stood over her, a long glittering knife in his hand.

“ It is the will of Shiva you are to be sacrificed,” he said in a hollow voice.

The wretched woman shrieked for mercy.

Slowly the knife descended until the point touched her throat ; she felt a slight prick, then she knew no more.

When she recovered from her swoon she was alone in front of the idol, the hideous face glaring down upon her.

Moaning pitifully, she crawled along the floor

towards the door. Paroës stopped her, took her by the arm, and dragged her on to her feet.

"Return with me," he said, pulling her towards the idol.

"No, no," she groaned, quaking all over.

"You must swear to obtain the girl for me."

"I cannot. How is it to be done?"

"I will find a way."

She took a dreadful oath as he repeated it, shuddering as she looked up at the image of Shiva.

Having thoroughly subdued her he quietened her fears somewhat, and gave her a little more money. Lisa, however, was in his power. She would never dare to disobey him after all she had gone through.

"Tell Abdool I must speak with him," he said.

"I will devise some plan, and you must help us."

She promised to convey his message, and hurried homewards, aching in every limb.

Her superstitious fears mastered her. She trembled at the horrible fate that awaited her if she thwarted Paroës.

When she reached the bungalow she sought out Abdool and told him the priest wanted him. The jamadar saw she was almost yellow with fright, and guessed what had happened.

Krishna was dancing before Raja and his visitors on the verandah. Lisa saw her, and shuddered. Hardened as she was, and accustomed to seeing much evil and suffering, she was horrified at the thought of the fate in store for the girl it she fell into Paroës' power.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PALACE OF SHIRAZI

HIS Highness the Marajah of Shirazi lived in his gorgeous palace of that name surrounded by every luxury that untold wealth could obtain. Crowds of servants, a bodyguard of soldiers, attended to his wants, and those of his numerous retinue. He was proud of his race, all powerful, despotic, and just. Born to be a ruler of millions, he early learned that he had merely to command to be obeyed. The possession of power being born with him, he had never known subjection. His will was law—no one disputed it. The enormous absolute power he wielded was far more real than that of an autocrat of all the Russias. His people were for the most part happy and contented, although misery could no more be stamped out in his dominions than in any other part of the world. To the people about his person he was kind and generous ; they held him somewhat in awe, and respected his actions and his judgment.

The palace was built on an eminence overlooking the surrounding country. There was an uninterrupted view for many miles, some of it thickly wooded, more under cultivation, and big tracts of jungle in which lay much that was attractive to the sportsman. It was an imposing view, harmonising with the beauty of the palace ; there was a wealth of Nature, and a wealth of art.

The Rajah spared none of his riches in the adornment of the palace of Shirazi ; he was young, but he came into his possessions early in life, and from the commencement he lavished money on his palace and the surroundings. A large staff of skilled workmen was constantly employed in the interior : decorators, gilders, carvers, gold beaters, men famous in all branches of Indian crafts, who made furniture of priceless value in the workshops, and many of whom had spent their lives in the service of the Princes of Shirazi.

Outside, gardeners were to be seen everywhere, a master mind guiding them in their work, the result being that the palace grounds were exquisitely lovely —dreams of romance.

The main court of the palace was of immense size, and in it played fountains of crystal water flowing into marble basins, jets of gold spouting refreshing streams. The columns which surrounded it gave it strength and grace, the gates leading out of it into the interior court were of ebony inlaid with plates of gold. The handles of these doors were gold lions' heads, solid and of great weight. The columns were of marble, dazzlingly clear, the walk beneath of the same substance.

The inner court was of exquisite design, beautified with all manner of colour and carvings. It had upper balconies with groined arches and galleries. Here again was a huge marble basin in the centre of which a fountain played, and bright coloured fish darted in the silvery depths. Beautiful plants and shrubs waved gracefully in all but imperceptible and slightly scented air. At the far end was a carved chair studded with gems and pearls, with a canopy

of airy red satin, looped up with pearls, the size of walnuts. Sweet-scented flowers and the peculiar smell of luscious fruits pleased the senses.

There were several of these courts, each leading to the apartments of the palace, which were of immense size and lofty. The ceilings in some were of odoriferous wood, splendidly carved; others were painted, and others again interwoven with gold and silver work. The floors were of polished wood, covered in some rooms with wondrous Eastern carpets, and in others with rugs of the finest texture. The walls were hung with priceless tapestries of Flanders workmanship, with a glowing radiance of colour that bewildered the sight.

There were gorgeous draperies of feather work wrought in various imitations of birds, insects, and flowers, the designs being of great beauty.

The palace was furnished throughout in the most sumptuous style, and withal in excellent taste; there seemed to be no ostentatious display of the wealth it contained, and which was visible on all sides. Many of the chairs were of gold studded with rubies, diamonds and pearls, and others were carved with a delicate skill almost inhuman, so intricate was the web-like work. Each article was worth a fabulous sum, representing so many fortunes. It was to this palace Raja and his guests came from Evermore. As usual, the Rajah brought with him from Sunpore several officers, their wives, and some daughters. The inner court presented an animated scene when they arrived. There was no formal ceremony. Raja was welcomed as a friend, and most of those present were known to him. The Rajah was partial to the society of English ladies.

and his courteous, high bred manners pleased them.

Amy Kane was an exceedingly pretty woman, and nothing loath to be singled out by the owner of this wonderful palace for special marks of attention. Major Kane smiled as he saw Shirazi in earnest conversation with her, evidently admiring her. He was proud of his wife, who had been the beauty of more than a season in Calcutta, and had finally chosen him from a large number of suitors for her hand. He knew she was pretty, and loved admiration, and thought it only natural. Jealousy had not troubled him ; he was too liberal minded to fall a victim to its consuming passion, yet it would go hard with the man who touched his honour.

“Amy has made another conquest,” he said to Raja. “Shirazi has fallen under her spell.”

“He is a devoted admirer of all pretty women,” replied Raja, “and there are few more likely to attract him than Mrs. Kane, who, may I say, is almost worthy of her husband.”

“Almost !” exclaimed the Major “More than worthy. By Jove ! I considered myself lucky when she accepted me. I had almost convinced myself I had not the ghost of a chance. You see, there were so many dashing young fellows around. I don’t know what she chose me for.”

“Your good qualities ; they are conspicuous. She could not fail to recognise them.”

The guests wandered about the gardens in groups, chatting, laughing—a gay, merry throng, discussing the recent meeting at Sunpore, guessing at the love matches made there, appraising the value of the men and women who had been in the festive camp.

Raja after a time found himself alone with Geraldine Margrave. They were seated in a shady nook free from observation, and happy in each other's society Krishna was the subject of their conversation, Mrs. Margrave expressing her satisfaction that Raja had persuaded the girl to accompany her to Calcutta.

"Although she is seventeen, one can hardly believe it," she said. "Her ideas are very simple ; in some things she is quite a child."

Raja agreed with her, thinking over Krishna's remarks about love, wondering what his companion really thought of him ; a sudden impulse prompted him to find out, but the task required delicate handling.

"She is a strange girl : has a strange way of speaking out as she thinks, without quite understanding the meaning of her words. Do you know what she told me ?" he asked, smiling at her.

Her heart beat fast ; she felt the colour come into her cheeks.

"Shall I tell you ?"

"If you wish," she replied faintly.

"You must not be offended. Of course, it is Krishna's way of looking at things, for which I am not responsible."

"I quite understand."

"She said she knew I loved you, and that she had told you so," he said. "Did she ?"

"Yes," replied Geraldine faintly.

"And were you very much amused, or very angry."

"I am afraid neither ; my feelings were quite different."

"May I ask how you felt ?"

"I can hardly tell you."

"We have known each other for some years," he said. "Do you mind me asking you a question?"

"No."

"Do you believe what Krishna said?"

"I told her we were old friends."

"Are we nothing more?"

"Raja, you are not fair to me. You are driving me into a corner."

"I believe she spoke the truth," he said musingly.

"You are not quite sure?" she asked smiling.

"Not absolutely certain whether my love is all you are entitled to expect."

"I am not exacting."

"But I am where you are concerned," he replied. "Did Krishna analyse your feelings?" he asked with a smile.

She laughed to cover her real feelings.

"I believe she informed me I loved you; she also at the same time said she loved you, and suggested that instead of taking her away from Evermore, I ought to take up my quarters there."

"Not half a bad idea from her point of view," he replied, laughing.

"Krishna in her innocence cannot understand why such a thing is impossible."

"Is it impossible?"

"Raja!"

"I mean—well, you know what I mean, only I am afraid to tell you exactly."

"Am I alarming? Are you afraid of me?"

"On the contrary. I am afraid of myself. It is the difficulty about Evermore stands in my way."

She looked surprised, and waited for him to continue.

“ It is a lonely life we lead there ; all very well for a man, but for a bright, clever woman, no. I would not ask you to share Evermore with me, it would not be fair.”

She placed her hand on his arm, and said softly—

“ You do not quite understand me, after so many years. I could be very happy at Evermore under certain conditions.”

He shook his head. “ Under no condition would it be a suitable place for you.”

“ Do you wish me to try the experiment ? ”

“ Geraldine ! ”

“ I mean it.”

“ You do not know what you propose to sacrifice.”

“ A few of the pomps and vanities. They will not be missed.”

“ Even I felt terribly lonely at first,” he said.

“ You were quite alone.”

He looked into her eyes, and saw happiness there if he chose to take it. Why did he hesitate ? Was it because the dark, graceful figure of a girl seemed to stand between them ?

Her hand was still upon his arm, he felt its warmth, the delicate pressure, the comforting assurance it imparted.

“ I have loved you, Geraldine, from the first moment I saw you. You were Captain Margrave’s wife, and he was my friend. You never suspected it, nor did he.”

“ No, he did not,” she said.

“ You ! did you ? ” he asked.

She smiled quietly as she replied—

“ A woman is quick at learning such things ; I thought you admired me.”

"It was wrong."

"Oh, no, not at all."

He was only half convinced. There was an interruption at the critical moment. Harry Lavaux and Mabel Hayson came up.

"Turtle doves," said Mabel. "Come along, Mr. Lavaux."

"Please stay," said Mrs. Margrave. "We shall be delighted if you can spare the time."

"You have chosen a splendid spot. Raja has an eye for beauty, natural and feminine," replied Mabel. "We have just come from the presence of His Highness. I told him all about your dancing girl. He wishes to see her, and when he discovers you he will ask you to send for her."

"My dancing girl," jarred upon Raja. He was not at all pleased Shirazi had heard of Krishna's abilities, yet it was quite natural for Mabel Hayson to tell him. It was Mrs. Margrave who spoke.

"I think you were wrong in calling her a dancing girl; it might give a false impression."

Mabel's face fell. "I am sorry," she replied. "I never thought of that, but Raja can explain when he mentions it. Here he comes with Mrs. Kane. Amy has made a conquest."

The Rajah and Mrs. Kane, laughing and talking, stopped when they came up, and he said—

"You never informed me you had a wonderful dancer at Evermore; it is selfish to keep her to yourself. Cannot you bring her here? I should like to see her."

"If your Highness wishes it," replied Raja, "I shall be very pleased to go for her."

"I can send."

“ I will go myself ; it will be better. She shall be here to-night.”

“ Mrs. Kane has a very high opinion of her dancing. She says also the girl is beautiful. Is she a native ? ”

“ My jamadar’s daughter, but I think she is a half caste ; I am almost sure of it.”

“ A mystery child,” replied the Rajah. “ There are many such.”

“ Are you really going ? ” asked Mrs. Margrave, when the others moved away.

“ Yes,” said Raja gloomily.

“ Shall you be back this evening ? ”

“ Soon after dinner. We can drive in my buggy. Geraldine,” he said, earnestly, “ I must tell you something about myself before I can ask you to come to Evermore ; it is only fair you should know.”

“ It will make no difference.” she answered, smiling. “ I am sure it is nothing very dreadful.”

“ Nevertheless, you must know it,” he said, “ and then you can judge for yourself.”

“ I shall be a very merciful judge,” was her reply.

CHAPTER XVIII

A STRUGGLE IN THE TEMPLE

RAJA was well mounted and rode rapidly towards Evermore. He was restless, uneasy in mind, he wished Mabel had not mentioned Krishna's name to the Rajah, not that he feared for her if she came to Shirazi, but to dance there, in the presence of his guests, would make her, to a certain extent, public property, and he wanted her all to himself. She would be fascinated, amazed, at the glories of the palace, but this did not trouble him, he knew her too well, and that all the dazzling splendour would not tempt her from him. Her dancing would surely please the Rajah, and he might desire to possess her, have her in the palace always at hand to amuse him and his guests, but there was no danger of Krishna accepting any offer he might make her. His way lay near by the temple, and as he approached it he heard strange cries. Reining in his horse, he listened ; he had heard rumours of the horrible rites Paroes was supposed to perform, but had never given much credence to the stories. Again the cry came, it sounded like a human voice ; if the priest was at his devilish work it was an opportune time to stop him. He cared nothing for the sanctity of the temple of Shiva, he hated the priest and all his works. Dismounting, he led his horse forward cautiously, with as little noise as possible.

Throwing the reins over the animal's head, he fastened him to the fence surrounding the building. Again he listened, but heard no sound. His curiosity being aroused, he was anxious to find out where the cry came from and what caused it. Pushing open the large door of the temple he looked in, peering through the gloom, seeing nothing but the faint outline of the huge black idol. Without hesitation he passed inside, and as the door closed behind him Paroes advanced from behind the altar.

When he saw Raja, the priest stopped, his appearance was totally unexpected. Fear possessed him, in turn to give way to rage at the prospect of his evil design being baffled.

They faced each other in silence, Raja being the first to advance. Paroes waited to receive him, being on his guard, and having a dagger hidden in the folds of his dress.

Raja noticed he wore a costly robe and that his dress was studded with jewels, probably he was adorned for the sacrifice, or whatever dark deeds he was about to perform. His position was one of some danger, he was not aware whether Paroes had fanatical assistants at these rites, if he had they would fall upon him and kill him without hesitation, considering they were doing a laudable act as he was desecrating the temple by his presence.

“Why are you here ? ” asked Paroes.

“I heard cries, and thought someone might need my help.”

“I am alone here, the cries did not come from the temple. Go.”

The priest spoke in hoarse tones and Raja saw he was strangely agitated. The man's manner con-

vinced him he was right in his conjecture and that Paroes lied to him.

“I do not believe you,” he said.

“This temple is sacred ; you have no right here,” was the answer.

“Sacred to the devil and all his works,” said Raja.

Paroes cursed him, his face convulsed with passion, his eyes rolled, and his mouth contorted.

Raja watched him, prepared for an attack, determined to measure strength with him, and not afraid of the result.

Again Paroes commanded him to leave the temple. but the more he persisted, the more determined he was to remain.

The priest was concealing something, what was it ?

“It is the first time I have paid you a visit. Now I am here, I have something to say to you.”

Paroes pointed to the door and advanced a couple of steps ; Raja stood his ground and the priest stopped.

“You have caused trouble amongst my people,” said Raja. “You have threatened to lay hold of one of my servants, a girl who is under my protection. If you harm a hair of her head I will shoot you like the dog you are ; you deserve a worse death. Abdool, my jamadar, is the father of the girl, you know her.”

Paroes eyes gleamed, and he put his right hand into the folds about his breast.

Raja saw the movement and smiled.

“I am not afraid of the dagger of a priest,” he said.

A faint moan sounded weirdly through the building, causing them both to start.

"What is that?" asked Raja. "One of your victims? I will see."

He raised his voice and heard in answer a smothered cry, the voice sounded strangely familiar. A terrible suspicion crossed his mind; supposing Paroes had succeeded in abducting Krishna during his absence at the palace? The thought moved him to action, he would satisfy himself as to who was in the temple.

Paroes guessed his resolve, and with a panther like spring fell upon him, the dagger raised in his hand.

Raja was too quick for him. Seizing his wrist in a grip of iron he tried to get hold of him round the waist. Paroes was a strong active man and his rage gave him power. They struggled desperately and the noise was heard. The cries were louder now, calls for help could be distinctly heard; it was Krishna's voice and Raja recognised it.

"You devil," he said, gasping, "you shall pay for this."

Putting forth all his strength he hurled Paroes backwards, and he fell heavily.

"Krishna, Krishna," shouted Raja.

"Here, I am here," she cried.

The sound came from the back of the idol, and he rushed round. He saw the door leading into Paroes' room, tried it and found it secured.

"Is that you, Krishna?" he said.

"Yes, Sahib, you will be too late," she replied in a strange voice.

"Too late!" What did she mean? His thoughts of what might have happened to her drove him

almost frantic. He beat the door with his fists, kicked at the wood, threw himself against it, trying to break down the barrier between them.

Paroës was not stunned by the blow, he gathered himself together and went swiftly round. Raja had his back to him, and he caught him by the neck, raising the dagger, aiming a deadly blow at him. Raja twisted suddenly round, the blade entering the fleshy part of his arm. The pain served to infuriate him, and he quickly wrenched himself free. Then he rushed upon Paroës and they fought madly for some minutes. Raja's strength told, and he again flung Paroës to the ground, the priest's head struck the stone steps with a crash and he lay insensible. Tearing part of his robe, Raja bound it tightly round his arm to staunch the blood, then stooping over him felt for the key of the door. He shook the priest roughly, and eventually it fell from under his robe. Raja picked it up hurriedly, put it in the lock and flung open the door.

Krishna, her hair dishevelled, her dress torn, her hands and face bleeding, was crouching on the ground.

Raja gave a cry of pain as he saw her condition and lifted her up into his arms.

"Krishna, my child," he said, "What has the brute done to you?"

She shuddered and tried to push him away.

"Where is he?" she said fearfully.

"Out there. I had a hard tussle with him, but I got the best of it."

"Let us go," she whispered. "This is a horrible place. I am frightened. He is a devil."

Raja supported her, and almost dragged her through the doorway.

Paroës was recovering, and the sight of his intended victim with Raja, brought him to his senses. With incredible swiftness he again caught hold of Raja, who had to loosen his grip upon Krishna to wrestle with him. Paroës was dizzy from the blow he had received, and this time the struggle was not long, Raja flung him into the room, pulled the door to and locked it.

Krishna was shivering with terror, almost fainting from the rough usage she had received, and which taxed her strength to the utmost. Raja tenderly led her to the entrance and when they were in the open air she seemed to revive. She then noticed the bandage on his arm and saw it was soaked with blood.

"You are wounded," she said quickly. "Did he stab you?"

"It is nothing," replied Raja, "it might have been a death blow."

She was in a sore plight, and had evidently been in a terrible struggle.

As Raja looked at her his fury against Paroës broke out again, and he said—

"I will go back and kill him."

"No, no," she said, "come away from this dreadful place."

"I can settle with him another time," said Raja. "I must get you home. You need rest." He was burning to question her, but saw she was in no condition to answer. Lifting her in his arms he carried her to his horse and seated her on the saddle, but saw she would not be able to retain her hold, she slipped off into his arms again.

The Arab was quiet and docile; he bade her lean

against him and hold on by his mane until he mounted, then when he was in the saddle he dragged her up and placed her in front of him.

It was a slow ride to Evermore, for he dare not put the horse out of a walk as his arm was stiff and painful, and he might not be able to hold her.

As he rode into the compound he noticed everything seemed as usual and wondered how Paroes had accomplished his evil design.

Abdool came hurriedly forward and the look of amazement on his face when he saw them was ample evidence that he was not even aware of Krishna's absence from the bungalow. He was profuse in his lamentations until Raja stopped him and said—

“Take her and carry her to her room.”

Abdool went across the compound carrying her in his arms, and laid her gently on her mattress. He asked no questions, he guessed what had happened and wondered how it had come about.

Raja followed him and said—

“Send Lisa here.”

The old woman came in, trembling in every limb; Abdool had told her how it was with Krishna.

“Attend to her, bathe her face and body, then come to me,” he said.

Lisa, moaning piteously, undressed the girl and soothed her wounds, there were many dark marks on her body.

Krishna was in a half fainting condition ; the old woman was very gentle with her and her aching body soon yielded to Lisa's bathing. The girl fell into a sound sleep and the woman watched her, shaking her head and crooning to herself—

“ It has happened without my help,” she muttered.
“ How did it come about ? ”

Quietly passing out of the room she went to Raja, who sat in a low chair, his bandaged arm hanging down. She saw the crimson stain and swiftly knelt down to examine it. Hurrying away she brought water, linen, and ointment. As she bathed the bandage it gradually softened and the caked blood gave way. The wound was not deep, but it had bled freely. She knew exactly what to do, and he felt refreshed when she placed the clean linen and tied it tightly.

“ Krishna was in the temple,” he said. “ How came she there ? ”

Lisa did not know ; the girl went to the village and Paroes must have seized her and carried her off.

“ Why did she go to the village ? ”

“ She has companions there, she wished to tell them about the pretty dresses the Sahib bought her.”

This was a guess on Lisa’s part, but it hit the mark and Raja accepted it as a natural explanation. He had no suspicion of Lisa, but he knew Abdool was afraid of the priest. He sent her to call the jamadar, who came and stood before him.

“ What do you know of this ? ” he asked.

“ Nothing, Sahib, I did not know she was away from the bungalow. I have been in the fields.”

“ Paroes had her in his power.” Abdool held up his hands in horror.

“ He is a devil,” said Raja.

Abdool said he was a thousand devils rolled into one, he cursed him and spat on the floor. Then he

bethought him he ought to send word to the palace explaining why he did not return.

With difficulty he wrote a note to Geraldine Margrave, requesting her to state the facts to the Rajah. He briefly explained what had happened, stating that Krishna was safe at Evermore, but he had not yet been able to ascertain anything from her.

“It was very fortunate I heard the cry as I was passing the temple,” he wrote, “Heaven knows what might have happened to her. I had a terrible struggle with the brute, but got him safely under lock and key. He can remain there until some of his devout followers find him, I hope he will starve. Make my excuses to the Rajah, and ask Major Kane if he will drive you here to-morrow, as I shall not be able to come, having a slight wound in my arm. Do not be alarmed, it is a mere scratch, but I had a narrow escape. I shall hear Krishna’s story before you return. It is absolutely necessary she should go with you to Calcutta, I dare not leave her here during my absence.”

CHAPTER XIX

KRISHNA'S PERIL

KRISHNA was refreshed after her sleep, but her body ached, and her limbs were stiff and sore. Realising she was safe in her own room she gave a sigh of satisfaction and in a few minutes tidied herself and went outside.

Raja was asleep, his bandaged arm resting in a sling. She sat down, waiting patiently until he awoke. The Sahib had saved her, his wound was for her, and as she thought of Paroes she shivered, while her love for Raja redoubled.

He was surprised to see her when he awoke, thinking it would take her some time to recover.

“ You are better ? ” he asked.

“ I am well, Sahib.”

“ Then tell me how it happened ; how you came into his power ? ”

“ It is no matter, I am here again,” she replied.

“ I wish to know everything, tell me ; conceal nothing.”

“ When you left,” she said, “ I looked at all my beautiful dresses, they are wonderful. I have one or two friends in the village and I wished to tell them of my good fortune. I knew they would be pleased to hear all about what you had given me.”

He smiled as he thought her nature was like that of other women ; she wished to show her friends she

had more beautiful dresses than they might ever hope to possess.

" No one saw me leave the Bungalow and I hoped to return before I was missed. I walked quickly until I came to the grove leading to the temple, where I sat down to rest as it was very hot. I had not been there long when I was suddenly caught from behind, my arms were pulled back, and I screamed. A cloth was thrown over my head and pulled tightly back, so tight that before long I was almost suffocated, and then my senses left me.

" When I came round I was in the room in the temple where you found me, and Paroes stood near me. I knew then that I was in his power and a great dread came down upon me, it seemed like a big black wall falling on me, crushing me with its weight. I could not cry out or speak ; every feeling in my body was numbed.

" He stood looking at me with his piercing black eyes and I wondered why he had brought me there. He did not speak, his fixed gaze fascinated me, as a snake does its victim. He knelt down beside me and put his arm round me, still I could not move. I heard him laugh and felt his hot breath on my face. He pushed me down on to the couch and then I fought him. Ah, how I fought, it was an awful struggle. I tore at his clothes, caught him by the throat, fought to reach his eyes. His fury was terrible ; he was like a mad beast, his eyes rolled and he panted for breath. I was given strength and beat him off. As I staggered to my feet he seized me again, tore my hair, his nails scratched my face and arms, my dress was rent, we fell together to the ground. What he wanted of me

I do not know ; he seemed so cruel, such a devil. He stood up and thrashed me with a strap until I cried for mercy. ‘ You are mine,’ he said, ‘ and you shall do as I will.’

“ It was the first time he had spoken. I asked him what was his will. He said I was to be offered to Shiva through him and no resistance on my part would be of any use. I thought he meant to kill me ; in the village I had been told of the sacrifices he offered to the god, and that the victims were thrown down the well.

“ He flung himself upon me, and bore me to the ground, it was then I cried aloud, struggled and fought for my life. I called your name and as he ceased for a moment we heard a movement in the temple ; it must have been you, Sahib, and you were just in time, for my strength was spent and he had me at his mercy He would have killed me, Sahib, do you not think so ? ”

He thought more, far worse, but he did not tell her. As he listened to her tale he felt a strong desire to kill Paroës, there was not room at Evermore for himself and the priest.

“ He dare not have killed you, Krishna,” he said. “ He shall suffer a thousand times more than you have done, his flesh shall be lashed from his bones, he shall be flogged to death.”

“ He is a priest,” she said.

“ That makes no difference, his devilish designs upon you are sufficient to cause his punishment to be great.”

“ My body aches,” said Krishna.

“ Poor brave little girl,” he said kindly. “ You fought well, Krishna, you are a wonderful girl to overcome him, he is strong.”

"I was given strength," she replied, "had you not come, I should have failed in the end."

Had he not come! It made his blood run cold to think what would have happened to her had he not arrived in time.

"You must go to Calcutta with Mrs. Margrave," he said. "I dare not leave you here."

"Yes," she answered without hesitation, "I will go."

When Geraldine Margrave arrived he related what had happened and told her Krishna's story. She was shocked at the depravity of the priest and at the thought of the narrow escape Krishna had.

"We leave to-morrow and she must go with me. She will not hesitate now, I will watch and guard her faithfully, no harm shall befall her while she is with me."

"There is one danger," said Raja, "if he learns she has gone to Calcutta with you he may follow."

"He will have no opportunity of harming her."

"Such a man has no doubt many friends who would help him to secure her; I know something of Calcutta."

"She will be at my house, when I go out she will be with me."

"You cannot take her everywhere, if she is left behind she must be guarded."

"Trust her to me, I will not fail either her or you. Raja, you love this girl?" she said suddenly.

He made no reply, he was asking himself, Did he love Krishna in the way she meant? The answer was difficult, but he felt he spoke the truth when he replied—

"I love her, but not in the way you suggest."

She shook her head doubtfully as she said—
“ I am afraid you do not know your own mind,
my friend.”

“ You may be right, yet I think you are wrong.
I do know my own mind, and I will tell it you when
the time comes.”

Amy Kane regarded Krishna's rescue by Raja as
quite a romance and said in a flippant tone to Mrs.
Margrave—

“ I should not wonder if he makes a fool of himself
by marrying the girl.” She had not forgiven him for
neglecting her attractions and her ill concealed
preference for his society.

When Geraldine Margrave left Evermore, Krishna
went with her, quite contented and looking forward
to the time when the Sahib would arrive in
Calcutta.

The day following their departure Raja rode to
the temple with no definite idea of his intentions.
If he found Paroes there the settling between them
would be heavy. He strode down the temple
hurriedly, found the key still in the door and entered
the room, a glance sufficed to show him it was
empty. He hardly knew whether he was relieved
or otherwise, had he found Paroes there he would
have been strongly inclined to hurl him down the
well after his victims. As he was not within reach
of his vengeance he calmed down.

He had not seen the black idol before, except
during the brief time he was in the building with
Paroes. Curiosity prompted him to examine it,
and he soon found it contained some curious
mechanism. How to work it he was not aware,
and there might be danger in touching springs

about which he knew nothing. He felt a strong inclination to wreak his vengeance on the hideous god, then laughed at the folly of such a proceeding. He looked at the big eye and the terrible face, the huge limbs and great body, and was not surprised at the poor ryots being frightened at the awful thing.

There were no signs of the priest anywhere ; by some means he had escaped from the room and vanished, probably dreading the consequences of his act. If he was gone from the neighbourhood so much the better, if he had ventured to return to Calcutta it might be so much the worse, and he was anxious for the time to arrive when he would journey there.

Krishna safe, for the present, there were numerous matters requiring attention. In the first place he was anxious to get the measure of Destiny in order to inform the Rajah what he thought of the horse's chance. He knew there would be keen rivalry between the Shirazi stable and his own as to which horse, Akbar or Destiny, would carry off the Cup.

Colin Warbeck and James Hythe were no friends to him and Raja had a suspicion they would go beyond the bounds of fair play if by doing so Akbar's triumph over Destiny could be assured. He was not far out in his calculation, for Colin Warbeck resented what he called his interference in the Rajah's training establishment. He had a long conversation with Hythe as soon as they returned from Sunpore, and impressed upon him that Akbar must beat Destiny.

The trainer was confident, he thought Akbar the better horse and that there was no occasion for

much doubt. Colin Warbeck, much as he disliked Raja, gave him credit for being clever and was not so sanguine as the trainer about the superiority of Akbar.

“ We must make sure of one thing, that Ben Aysha rides Akbar and carries the first colours.”

“ He'll have to ride Akbar, there's no option for him,” replied Hythe.

“ His Highness may give him his choice.”

“ In that case he is sure to choose our horse, he knows him well.”

“ Raja may ask permission for him to ride Destiny in a trial.”

“ He will not learn much from that ; I can easily talk him over.”

Warbeck had doubts about this, he knew Aysha was a good judge of a horse's form. It would be nothing short of a “slight if Akbar carried the red cap instead of the gold.

They were aware Raja would leave no stone unturned to win and they did not misjudge him. Destiny was given strong work immediately and galloped in such resolute style that even Raja was satisfied.

There was no mistaking the swinging easy stride, it meant covering the ground without over exertion. The six-year-old brown—he was nearly black—had a way of his own in settling down to his work, he revelled in it, the more he galloped the more he liked it. There was plenty of heart in him, he had not to be coaxed and petted to do his best, nor did he sniff his food disdainfully ; on the contrary, he cleaned up anything Raja gave him. “ Hard as nails,” was the opinion Raja had of him, and it was

fully deserved. Although six years old he was at his best, for he had had an easy life in his early days. He had not been run off his legs as a two-year-old, nor was his three-year-old career very promising. When he was fairly set at four he knew what it meant to work hard and soon felt the benefit of training severe enough, but not overdone. There was much in the horse's favour. He was thoroughly acclimatised, and had been specially looked after with a view to the Cup for a couple of years.

In company with Mogul, Black Island and Gazelle, to bring them along, he was now doing gallops fit for a Cesarewitch horse. The lads knew how to ride and obeyed orders. Raja was a good master when obeyed, he had a swift method of correcting disobedience which impressed the juvenile mind. There was no hoodwinking him and they were aware of it. Mischievous as monkeys, these native lads were sometimes difficult to keep in hand. Success made them top heavy and they soon fell. Kept at one steady level, they passed muster. Raja knew how to handle them, too much praise was not good for them, they were kept in continual expectation of going a step higher and this condition suited them. They were not jealous until one of their number was singled out and promoted; when this occurred a council was held and the unhappy lad who had earned reward wished he had remained stationary in the ranks.

They were aware something of importance was attached to these frequent gallops in which Destiny took part, and as the Viceroy's Cup was the height of every sportsman's ambition they concluded Destiny was to win this event.

These lads were born gamblers, it was their sole occupation in times of leisure, luckily they were generally occupied. Their gambling was harmless, because they had very little to lose, and it resembled more the playing of marbles, which after all is an early form of acquiring much for little without any great effort on the part of the schoolboys. When money was an unknown quantity they gambled with small shells fished out of the river bed, or the nearest pool ; if these failed they were known to become desperately interested in the interchange of minute pebbles. In obscure corners of the stable they struggled to get the better of each other by any system of fraud or chicanery that happened to occur to them.

The Viceroy's Cup, however, was their great plunge of the year, and desperate were the efforts to amass a few rupees to put on. A rupee was regarded by the proud possessor with almost as much veneration as is bestowed upon a priceless jewel, or work of art, by a connoisseur. It was handled reverently, concealed with much cunning ; this was necessary, the law of finding anyhow and keeping anyhow being thoroughly established with no chance of repeal.

The boys who were taken to Calcutta with the horses were looked up to, for which adoration they were expected to bring back gifts in kind. If they failed to distribute tips as became their exalted station, they were subjected to petty insults and many inconveniences much in the manner prevailing in higher society.

These lads were all interested in Destiny, and determined to profit if he won.

CHAPTER XX

THE OLD FAKIR

RAJA rode to Shirazi to arrange a day for the great trial at Evermore, as he wished the Rajah to be present; then he could see for himself how the horse ran.

The Rajah was disappointed at not seeing Krishna dance, very angry when Mrs. Margrave explained the cause of her absence. Raja still had his arm in a sling and the Rajah said—

“ You were wounded ; is it anything serious ? ”

“ It might have been,” he replied, “ but fortunately the dagger struck my arm instead of my heart.”

“ Have you seen the man since ? ”

“ No, I locked him in a room in the temple, but he disappeared. I suppose someone let him out.”

“ He must be punished, such outrage cannot be permitted.”

“ I fancy he has left the district, but he may return.”

“ If you require assistance some of my men shall take him, then we can deal with him as he deserves. Where is the girl ? ”

“ Gone to Calcutta with Mrs. Margrave ; she will be safe there.”

“ Mrs. Margrave is a very sensible woman ; she is half in love with you, lucky man.”

“ I think she likes me,” was Raja’s reply.

“There will be a chance of seeing this wonderful girl when we are in Calcutta.”

“If your Highness wishes it that can easily be arranged.”

The Rajah regarded him curiously ; he thought how different he was from many men of his class. Krishna’s presence in some bungalows would not bear the same interpretation as it did at Evermore. He had not much faith in the morality of many of the native girls, and if Krishna was different to the majority it was because Raja’s conduct favoured it.

Changing the subject he inquired about Destiny.

“He is doing splendid work,” said Raja, “and by Christmas will be as fit as he can be made. He’s a perfect glutton for work. I came here to arrange about the trial, I wish you to see it.”

“I will come. When does it take place ?”

“That is as your Highness pleases; any time will be suitable to me.”

“Would it be better to have Akbar in the trial ?”

Raja had anticipated this suggestion and foresaw difficulties. He knew Hythe would strongly object to Akbar being sent to Evermore for such a purpose, still, if the Rajah desired it he had no objections to offer.

“If you wish Akbar to take part in the trial it can be arranged. I will also ask Lavaux to let Kyban run, then with Mogul, Black Island, and Gazelle, we can have a real race with the colours up. Ben Aysha can ride Akbar and I will secure Fred Ferney for Destiny, then there will be no doubt about the reliability of the spin.”

The Rajah smiled, he loved racing, and the

prospect of a rattling set-to at Evermore was congenial.

Raja accompanied him into the palace and Colin Warbeck was summoned. The secretary knew of Raja's arrival, and guessed the object of his visit, which he mentioned to the trainer, who strongly resented Akbar being tried with Destiny.

"If His Highness wishes it, I see no way out of it," he grumbled.

"Make some excuse," said the trainer. "The fellow seems to have it all his own way, he might just as well handle the blessed lot for all the say we have in the matter."

"I'll put a spoke in his wheel one of these days," said Warbeck grimly. "I'd like to find out what he's doing with that dancing girl at Evermore. It is all very well for him to act the saint, he's no better than the rest of us."

"Saints are generally sneaks," said the trainer.

"Much as I dislike him I don't think he is one."

"We are to have a trial at Evermore," said the Rajah, "and I wish Akbar to be in it."

"In a trial at Evermore!" exclaimed the secretary.

"Yes, why not?" he asked sharply

"I thought, your Highness, the trial would be here, especially if Akbar is to run in it."

"What do you say?" he said turning to Raja, who replied without hesitation that it would be far simpler to take Akbar to Evermore than for him to bring four horses to Shirazi.

"Besides," he added, "there is no trying tackle here, and I have everything at hand."

“Quite so, you see the reasonableness of his remarks.”

“It is rather unfair to Hythe, I think,” protested the secretary.

The Rajah looked angry; he was not accustomed to having his wishes crossed, and his secretary had irritated him of late.

“Does he object?” asked the Rajah.

“He would not object to anything your Highness desired,” replied Warbeck, noticing the symptoms and backing down. “He is most anxious to do his best with Akbar, and naturally he wishes to have the horse constantly under his care.”

“Perhaps it will be as well to leave Akbar out,” suggested Raja.

“No, he runs, and at Evermore. Will the end of the week suit you for the trial?”

“Yes.”

“I will be there, I will come the night before, if you will have me.”

“Your Highness, I shall esteem it an honour. I am afraid we have but poor accommodation for you at Evermore.”

The Rajah smiled as he replied—

“There will be no lack of hospitality and my wants are moderate. I desire you make no preparations to receive me.”

Colin Warbeck was surprised beyond measure at this act of condescension. His Highness to stay at the planter’s bungalow for the night! It was an outrage on the proprieties. He was not aware that this was not the first time by many His Highness had visited Raja, although he had not remained the night.

Having expressed his pleasure the Rajah left them and no sooner was he out of hearing than Colin Warbeck said—

“I think it a confounded shame Hythe should be ordered to take Akbar to Evermore. I suppose it was your suggestion that the horse should take part in the trial.”

“On the contrary, it was His Highness who proposed it.”

“Probably at your instigation.”

“As the matter is settled, there is no occasion to discuss it.”

“It is not every planter who can afford to keep a dancing girl on the premises,” sneered Colin, hinting that this was probably the reason of the Rajah’s visit.

Raja looked dangerous, but he kept his temper.

“Krishna is at present on her way to Calcutta, if she has not already arrived there.”

“Sent her ahead of you for the race week, I suppose.”

“She accompanied Mrs. Margrave as her companion.”

Colin Warbeck laughed.

“Then Mrs. Margrave must have her eyes shut.”

“Why?” asked Raja, dangerously quiet.

“Because when a dancing girl is an occupant of a planter’s bungalow there is not far to seek for the reason.”

“You judge others by your own standard.”

“I am satisfied to do so.”

“I should be very sorry to be classified with you,” said Raja.

“ Not good enough for you, eh ? ” sneered Colin.

“ No, I dislike cads.”

“ Do you apply that epithet to me ? ” asked Colin angrily.

“ It is applicable after your remarks. Allow me to inform you that my dancing girl, as you call her, is in every way a suitable companion for Mrs. Margrave.”

“ I am sorry for your opinion of Mrs. Margrave, does she know it ? ”

“ We perfectly understand each other.”

“ And she is willing to share your favours with the girl ? I am rather surprised.”

“ You are a beast,” said Raja.

Colin Warbeck turned white with rage.

“ You are safe here,” he said, “ but you shall answer to me for this insult.”

“ Wherever and whenever you please,” was Raja’s quiet reply. “ I shall be most happy to prove the truth of my words.”

Colin Warbeck had behaved badly, and knew it, but this only increased his animus against Raja; the man who commits a wrong is far more vindictive than the man wronged.

Raja had no desire to remain at Shirazi, so was soon on his way home.

Shortly after leaving the palace, he passed a number of elephants, their mahouts on their necks. They were coming from the shallows near the river, where they had been bathing and enjoying themselves. They were huge beasts, the property of the Rajah, who had many of them at Shirazi. As he drew near the water he saw about a score more, some lying down in the shallows, the mahouts

standing on their bodies, others kneeling, their trunks under water up to their tusks. Round the shallows was a long dense mass of green weeds and there were numerous openings. It might not be unfairly compared to a bit of the Broads with a vast difference in the vegetation. The mahouts had perfect control over the elephants and talked freely as their charges revelled in the bath.

The land was too much under cultivation and the inhabitants too numerous for much jungle to remain about Shirazi and Evermore, but within reach there was ample for sport of the best kind.

It was in the big Sal forests the best sport was to be had, and Raja often went there with a hunting party from the palace.

Riding leisurely along, he passed a trio of wandering gipsies, a man and two women. The former was a thieving looking fellow, wearing a dirty loin cloth, with a piece of linen that had once been white slung over his shoulder, and a dingy yellow turban on his head. One woman had a buck red flowing dress, with a long white garment over her head hanging down to her heels, the third was habited in a combination of red, blue and yellow, caked with dust and dirt. These nuthnees, or female gipsies, were most repulsive with their long skinny fingers, dishevelled hair and bare hanging bosoms. When they saw Raja approaching, they stood in his path, soliciting alms with shrill cries, shaking their long dirty fingers, and gesticulating in a weird manner resembling the writhings of some hideous hobgoblins. Raja paid no heed to them, and as the nuth, the male gipsy, raised his staff he uncurled his whip and flicked him across the shoulders. This

action brought down upon him a volley of curses, which fell harmlessly and hurt him not.

As he entered the village he saw the old Moonshee surrounded by a number of ryots. The scribe was busily engaged writing notes for them and Raja wondered, not for the first time, what on earth they found of sufficient value to commit to paper.

The Moonshee looked up and smiled as he passed, the ryots respectfully saluting him.

The drowsiness of the air affected him and he allowed his horse to walk leisurely, a pace the animal probably wondered at, and which he seldom used. A cloud passed over his face as he glanced down the grove towards the temple, and he was surprised to see an old man sitting down by the path. He saw by his appearance he was a Fakir, of which there are thousands in the land. Raja stopped and called to him and the Fakir hobbled towards him. He was a poor, withered, shattered old Hindoo, mild eyed, with a look of pious resignation on his face. His body was daubed over with a kind of white and red clay, his matted hair was twisted into a big unsightly coil on the top of his head, a meagre worn out rag hung round his waist, the only clothing he had.

Raja judged him to be a harmless, inoffensive, pious old Hindoo hermit, not one of the rascally thieves sometimes masquerading as Fakirs, and took pity upon him.

“Here, take this,” he said, handing him a rupee.

The old man looked at it and said—

“I am in God’s hands ; whatever He wills is best.”

It occurred to Raja the Hindoo might know Paroes, and he put the question to him.

There was a gleam of fire in the patient sunken eyes, the long thin bony hands clutched convulsively, the withered skin of his body seemed to wrinkle and crinkle.

Suddenly he drew himself up and extending his hands cursed Paroes bitterly.

"He has done you some wrong?" questioned Raja.

"He took my wife, and after that he took my girl, he is accursed."

This wretched looking object once had a wife and child, and Paroes had taken them from him!

"She was young, my wife, I was old, he coveted her and persuaded her and she took my child and followed him."

"Why are you here?"

"To seek him, but I cannot find him."

"He will return," said Raja, "I too am looking for him."

The old man raised his eyes to Raja, and they roamed over his strong powerful figure, and he said again—

"Whatever God wills is best."

Evidently he considered Raja a fit instrument of vengeance.

"You are going to remain here?"

The Fakir nodded, and Raja said—

"You shall have food from my bungalow; it shall be sent to you here."

"The Sahib is good."

"When Paroes returns come to the bungalow and warn me."

"It is done."

"You know where I live?"

“ You are Raja Sahib, I know where you live, your name is honey in the mouths of men.”

Raja smiled, he thought there had not been much honey attaching to his name in Colin Warbeck’s mouth.

Raja left him ; as he looked back he saw him sitting in the same position by the wayside under the shade of the great trees.

The Fakir watched him ride away, muttering to himself—

“ Raja Sahib is strong and brave. He will avenge me, but I shall dip my hands in Paroes’ blood, I care not, I will wash in his blood.”

At nightfall the Fakir went into the village and meeting the Moonshee, spoke to him as a friend.

“ Write for me,” said the Fakir.

The Moonshee took out the implements of his business, and squatted down.

“ What shall I write ? ”

“ Paroes is in the temple ; come quickly,” said the Fakir

The Moonshee looked puzzled, he knew the priest was away.

“ He is not there,” he said.

“ Write it,” he said.

The Moonshee wrote and folded the paper.

“ Open it.”

He did so, and the old Hindoo said—

“ Sign it. The old Fakir to whom you gave the rupee.”

“ It is done,” said the Moonshee.

The Fakir held out the rupee, but the Moonshee said—

“ I will take no payment from you.”

CHAPTER XXI

AKBAR SHOWS FORM

HIS Highness the Marajah of Shirazi was at Evermore, it was a great event, and Abdool was impressed. The jamadar had seen him at the bungalow before but never knew of him remaining for the night, this was a condescension he was not prepared for and it overwhelmed him with the Sahib's importance, a portion of which he allotted to himself.

To Abdool the Rajah was the personification of all that was mighty and powerful, nothing the Indian potentate did, or wished to be done, surprised him. It increased the jamadar's respect for the Sahib, if that were possible. The Rajah enjoyed his freedom at Evermore, it was a respite from ceremony, a relief from the gorgeousness of his palace. He had a critical eye for land under cultivation and saw the Evermore fields were well tilled, the planter's estate a credit to the owner.

The Bungalow pleased him; it was comfortable, comely, well furnished and convenient. He sighed with a sense of relief as he sat down on a lounge on the verandah and smoked with his host.

“ You are a successful man,” said the Rajah, “ and it is deserved. Your fields are well cultivated, your ryots look contented.”

“Your Highness is observant,” said Raja smiling.

“I know when land is having justice done to it. I wish we had more men of your stamp here. A planter’s life is not unhappy.”

“By no means,” replied Raja; “and when combined with sport and racing it is a delightful existence; such is my experience.”

“Wealth and responsibility are burdensome. I rule over millions of subjects. Sometimes I wonder if I rule well.”

“Your Highness’s record is brilliant; no one doubts you rule well.”

“I do my best and the result is not unsatisfactory.”

“Your Highness was pleased with your welcome in England?” The Rajah’s expressive face lit up with pleasure, his dark eyes gleamed.

“Everything was nobly done. Our great ruler honoured me. I was delighted beyond measure. It is a wonderful country I was at Ascot; your countrywomen are very beautiful. The scene was new to me; it was like everything in England, great, yet there was something lacking.”

“Colour perhaps,” said Raja. “You missed the Indian skies.”

“It may be so. I was not sorry to return to Shirazi.”

The Rajah’s servants were all housed at Evermore, and there was some difficulty in accommodating them, but Abdool worked wonders and gave as much satisfaction as possible under the circumstances.

They were astir early in the morning, and the

Rajah rode out to the training ground with his host.

Hythe was in charge of Akbar, Ben Aysha riding a polo pony in company with Fred Ferney. The two jockeys were anxious about the result of the spin, as it would probably decide which of them would be on the back of the Cup winner. Aysha had the choice of mounts, and if Destiny beat Akbar, would probably ride him in the Cup. This was not much to Ferney's liking, but he knew it was only due to Aysha that he should be given his choice. Akbar looked very well, even better than at Sunpore, and seemed to have filled out, the tucked up appearance he had there had vanished.

When Destiny was stripped, the Rajah expressed his delight, and as he glanced from one horse to the other, thought it would be very hard luck indeed if he did not win the great race. Destiny was not quite so commanding as Akbar, and yet a shrewd judge would probably have selected him in preference. He was not quite as fit as he could be made, and Raja knew if Akbar beat him it would not discount his chance for the Cup. It was to be a genuine gallop, Gazelle to make the pace, with Mogul, Black Island, and Kyban to do their best.

James Hythe was nervously anxious to win the trial; it would, he thought, prove to the Rajah that his system of training the horse was right and that his contention that he did not require strong work was wrong.

All the riders had colours up, Destiny carrying the light blue and red cap of Raja, and Akbar the blue, crimson and gold.

The distance was a mile and a half, and Gazelle went away at a rare pace, Mogul was to jump in half way and bring them home.

It was a pretty sight, and a number of ryots on their way to the fields stopped to look at the race. They stood in brown dots, five or six together; it was the first time most of them had ever seen the bright racing jackets worn by the riders. They gesticulated and talked loudly, excited over the unaccustomed scene.

Gazelle did his work well, the Arab was wonderfully fast for a mile.

Aysha kept Akbar well in hand, and much to his delight thought he had never gone better.

Destiny pulled hard, but this was his usual style of going, and Ferney understood him. Both horses galloped splendidly, and the Rajah felt he had not had his journey for nothing.

Gazelle having accomplished his task dropped back and Mogul set the pace. They came along at a tremendous rate, Black Island and Kyban racing well with the cracks.

A quarter of a mile from where the Rajah sat on his horse, Aysha sent Akbar along at top speed and he was soon level with Mogul. Ferney brought up Destiny and the trio galloped neck and neck for a couple of hundred yards, when Akbar broke the line and crept to the front. Raja saw the move and knew Destiny would not quite win; it was, however, no more than he expected, and he was not at all displeased, it would put James Hythe off his guard, make him over confident, a state of mind he was prone to.

Hythe's face expressed his jubilation; he was

taking the wind out of Raja's sails, and nothing gave him more pleasure.

Akbar strode ahead in gallant style, passing the Rajah a couple of lengths in front of Mogul, with Destiny third, some distance behind.

The Rajah was delighted at Akbar's win, for he preferred him to Destiny, and commenced to chaff Raja in his gayest manner.

"I am right," he said; "it will be Akbar who will win the Cup."

"He certainly had considerably the best of it," replied Raja cautiously.

"With two such horses I ought to be first and second."

"I hope so, your Highness."

"Will Destiny improve?"

"Yes!"

The answer was short and sharp, and the Rajah looked curiously at him.

"How much will he improve?"

"That is difficult to say, but I can promise some improvement on his form; he is short of one or two gallops. This will do him no end of good; it is exactly what he wanted. A race with the colours up puts heart into a horse, gives him confidence."

Ilvthe came up leading Akbar looking mightily satisfied.

"Akbar won easily, your Highness," he said.

"He did, you have trained him well. I hope he will win the Cup."

"He must win if your Highness is to be successful."

"Then you do not give Destiny a chance?"

"Not with Akbar."

“They will both run, but I suppose Aysha will ride Akbar.”

“Ask him, your Highness,” replied Hythe smiling.

Ben Aysha decided there and then to ride Akbar, Raja suggested Fred Ferney should be engaged for Destiny, and this was done.

There was a peculiar smile on Ferney’s face when he heard Ben Aysha’s decision; he knew Destiny could have been closer up, although he could not have won. The Viceroy’s Cup was a mile and three-quarters, a quarter of a mile farther than the trial, and he was aware the extra distance would be in favour of Destiny.

The Rajah returned to Shirazi the same day, leaving behind him a handsome ring which he asked Raja to accept as a token of his regard.

“I am afraid you will have nothing to draw over the Cup,” he said laughing.

“I am quite content with the price,” replied Raja; “but I will let your Highness know exactly what I think when we arrive in Calcutta.”

“Your judgment is good; I shall respect it,” was the reply.

When the bustle attending their departure subsided, Raja called Ferney on one side and asked him what he thought of the gallop.

“Did you ride Destiny right out?”

“No; when I found I could not win I eased him. He had Mogul settled.”

“Could you have run Akbar to a length?”

“I think so; I am sure of it.”

“We can rub that length off before Christmas.”

"And there's another quarter of a mile," said Ferney.

"That is in our favour."

"Ben's made a mistake."

"All the better for you. Will you stay here and finish him off in his work?"

"With pleasure. Is there to be another trial?"

"A rough up with Mogul, Black Island, Gazelle and Kyban."

"Why put Kyban in? He ran very badly this morning."

"Too bad to be true. He is a good horse."

"James Hythe will be wild if Destiny beats him in the Cup."

"I rather fancy it will be a very unpleasant surprise for him."

Ferney chuckled. He did not like Hythe, and the mere thought of causing him annoyance was exhilarating.

The boys were downhearted at the result of the trial. They made certain of Destiny winning, and the previous night Ben Aysha had accommodated them with a small wager on the result. This they lost, and there was scarceness in the land.

It was absolutely necessary money should be raised before the horses went to Calcutta. Loans were difficult to obtain. There was Hasan, he might be approached, and since his trip to Sunpore he had gone about with his head high, a sure sign of importance and increased wealth. Hasan was a bad man to owe money to; he demanded its return to the uttermost copper, moreover he never gave time. The spirit of the usurer was strong within him, he would have made an excellent

money lender. His method of reckoning interest was his own, percentages he knew nothing of. If he lent a rupee he required another rupee to be added to it when returned. If he had been told a hundred per cent. was extortionate, his reply would have been that when he lent one rupee he expected it to acquire another coin of equal value when it returned to him. Hasan was the stable banker; in this position he was just. He never kept accounts, but he knew exactly how much each depositor had to his credit. In his early banking days he used the back part of a stable door to place the figures on, but when one "limb of the devil" discovered his ledger and made additions on the credit side, Hasan put everything down on the tablets of his memory

Ben Aysha had drained the bank dry, and Calcutta loomed near at hand.

The committee of ways and means met in a dark corner of the stable; in this particular spot everything was dark, including the boys and their deeds.

Hasan's great grandfather was alluded to as a thief, rogue and vagabond, that he was accursed they had no doubt, and Hasan, the son of a thief, had inherited all the bad qualities of generations of ancestors. Having consigned Hasan by name to the regions of eternal torment, the committee decided to approach him, in the body, and solicit help. More important committees than the black boys of Evermore have sat to consider how to raise loans. There is a charmingly subtle fascination about getting money easily, and a loan, when the borrowing takes place, seems wonderfully simple, when the repaying is at hand it becomes necessary

to borrow again to fulfil obligations, when the bed rock of borrowing is reached there is a financial earthquake. In this case Hasan was the head and the bed rock, for there was no getting beyond him.

There was difficulty in approaching him. He had been known to use his whip freely as a salutary lesson to would be money seekers. To receive blows when coin was required was worse than getting stones in lieu of bread.

The Moonshee was suggested; the scribe had been known to advance money to villagers, why not to the more high caste stable boy of Evermore ? Against the Moonshee proposal was the fact that they knew not the depths of extortion to which he might descend; with Hasan they had a certainty of their debt being doubled.

The suggester of the Moonshee was obstinate; he saw no reason why he should not be approached. The committee took sides, it was divided against itself, and fell upon each other.

At this point of the discussion Hasan arrived and cleared the committee room. When he retired it was re-occupied and the cause of the breaking up was forgotten.

Hasan's arbitrary act, however, gave the Moonshee a majority, and one boy, known as Flax, was deputed to interview the writer. Flax was reckoned a persuasive boy, and he sallied forth to draw the Moonshee.

He mentioned the terrible iniquities of Hasan, how the wretched man, whose ancestors were beyond all evil doers in sin, robbed, thieved, and otherwise maltreated the boys of Evermore.

The Moonshee listened attentively, and then

asked the reason he was honoured with a visit from such a paragon of eloquence as Flax.

“ It is to borrow, Moonshee, that I came.”

“ For what purpose ? ”

“ When some of the boys go to Calcutta we depute them to purchase gifts for the holy men and offerings for the temple.”

One of the Moonshee’s eyes shut; it was a sign that he was moved.

“ How much do they require for this holy work ? ”

“ Twenty rupees.”

The Moonshee gasped.

“ For how long ? ”

“ Until we receive our next pay from the Sahib.”

“ It is for holy gifts ? ” said the Moonshee, shutting both eyes.

“ For the holy men and the temple,” said Flax.

“ Come to me to-morrow night, and it shall be yours. You must sign the paper to return me thirty rupees.”

Flax was jubilant; this was half Hasan’s price.

“ You are a just man,” said Flax, patronisingly.

“ It shall be repaid.”

“ That is as destiny ordains.”

Flax stared at him. What did this scribbling old Moonshee know about Destiny ?

“ Who told you ? ” he asked.

The Moonshee looked puzzled.

“ About Destiny ? ” asked Flax.

The writer was still more perplexed and shook his head.

“ To-morrow night,” he said again.

Flax ran all the way to Evermore, reported the

success of his mission, and wound up by saying the Moonshee knew all about Destiny, and said he was ordained to win, whatever that meant.

It was unanimously resolved that Hasan was to be informed he was an extortioner and an abomination, and that loans were now obtainable at half the Hasian price.

CHAPTER XXII

GERALDINE MARGRAVE'S COMPANION

GERALDINE MARGRAVE found Krishna interesting; the girl had a naive way of asking and answering questions that was amusing; there was an originality about her decidedly entertaining.

On their arrival in Calcutta, there was some surprise manifested in the household at the addition of Krishna to the already sufficiently large staff; but this was as nothing to the astonishment at the position assigned her. It was not that Krishna was well treated: all the servants were thoughtfully cared for, but she had liberties, and was on terms of friendship with Mrs. Margrave that puzzled them and aroused jealous feelings.

Mrs. Margrave noticed this, and wisely ignored it, and Krishna's behaviour was calculated to smooth things over. Her beauty attracted attention wherever she went, and there was much curiosity about her.

Geraldine took the girl everywhere when possible, and Krishna was astounded at the life in Calcutta; the gay scene, the busy throng, the marvellous bazaars, the signs of great wealth mingling with great poverty as it is in every large city. She could not fail to notice the looks of admiration of the men, the supercilious stares of the women. It was

pleasant to be admired, the Sahib would be pleased she thought.

Geraldine Margrave had many acquaintances, and a few friends.

Major and Mrs. Kane might be numbered amongst the latter, at least she was sure of him, somewhat doubtful about his wife. Amy Kane was fond of flirtation, and there was ample opportunity for it. Many of the officers were unmarried, and nothing loath to pass their time in her society.

Bruce Kane was a plain spoken, down right honest man, and thought nothing of his wife's desire for lively society, being younger than himself it was only natural, and he had implicit confidence in her and his brother officers. For a soldier comrade to deliberately plan the dishonour of a brother officer was an offence, he thought, no man wearing the uniform would ever be guilty of. Amy Kane had matters very much her own way; went where she wished, did as she felt inclined. The freedom she enjoyed caused many officers' wives to regard her with envy; they begrudged her a latitude they did not possess. She gave them no cause for gossip, her conquests were harmless; so far the joints in her armour were perfect. She rode well, danced exquisitely, two very desirable accomplishments in the eyes of her male friends. Her husband was proud of her; he thought her beautiful and saw no fault in her.

In return for his faith and adoration, Amy Kane acknowledged to herself that there was not a man of her acquaintance equal to her husband, the nearest approach to him was Raja, and perhaps His Highness of Shirazi. That powerful noble had

flattered her, singled her out for special attention, done his best to please her; in the first place because he admired Bruce Kane, in the second place because he liked the lady. The evident neglect of Raja to appreciate her manifold attractions piqued her, made her angry. She was so accustomed to easy conquests that it was a new sensation, not altogether disagreeable, because it aroused her to exert herself.

The Major was amused. He ventured to say—

“ You will find Raja difficult to manage, Amy. He is not a ladies' man, but he is one of the best fellows I know.”

She tossed her pretty head and said disdainfully, that it was a matter of indifference whether Raja paid her attentions or otherwise; at the same time hinted that with a girl like Krishna in his household he could not be considered as a hater of the sex.

“ He is not that by any means,” said the Major. “ I did not mean to imply such was the case. As for the girl, he has her at Evermore in order to be able to protect her.”

“ Very kind of him, I am sure,” she said smiling. “ He is choice in his selection; he knows where to bestow his favours.”

Amy Kane was rather amused at Geraldine Margrave patronising Raja's protege.

“ It is one way of obtaining favour from him, and I fancy Geraldine is anxious to secure as much of his good will as she can,” she said to Bruce.

“ That is a somewhat uncharitable remark for you, my dear !” he replied. “ I think Raja is very much attached to Mrs. Margrave.”

"Bruce, you know nothing about such things; war is your game, you understand it; everyone knows you are a good soldier, but the best of warriors fail when they try to understand the ladies."

He laughed, admitting she was probably right.

"At any rate, I understand you," he said, "and that is quite sufficient."

"He's a dear, good fellow," she thought as she watched him striding away; "and, and — well, I'm not half good enough for him."

The Major's house was generally lively, his wife took care of that, and he did not mind it in the least. He was an enthusiastic soldier and loved the multifarious duties of his profession, which took up the bulk of his time.

It was at the Kane's that the younger officers sought for information regarding Krishna. There was a certain Captain Gerard Bertram, in the same regiment as Major Kane, who had great reputation as a lady killer. He was good looking, tall, of soldierly bearing, and excellent powers of conversation. He knew Geraldine Margrave, had attempted to ingratiate himself with her since her husband's death, but had not succeeded as he desired. She treated him courteously but kept him at a distance, and all his efforts to establish a warm friendship had failed. He saw Krishna seated by her side in her carriage, and her beauty aroused his curiosity.

Who was she? Where did she come from? These questions he thought Major Kane's wife would be able to answer if anyone could.

Accordingly he called, when the Major was out, and much to his satisfaction, found her alone.

Amy Kane was always ready to gossip, especially with such a companionable man as Captain Bertram. She looked charming in her light thin costume, which showed the outline of her form, and welcomed him cordially.

He had not seen her since her return from Sunpore, and asked her how she enjoyed her visit to the camp.

"It is a delightful week," he said. "I was awfully disappointed I was unable to be present."

"We had a very good time," she said. "I have seldom spent a more agreeable week. It was one continual round of festivities, and I never tired of it all. The racing was, I suppose, good, but to me it was the least interesting part, although I ought not to say that as I won two sweeps."

"Lucky lady," he said laughing. "Who owned the winners?"

"Raja Ranji owned Black Island; I forget who owned the others."

"Raja Ranji! Who is he? What a queer name!"

"Surely you know him?" she asked surprised.

"You forget I have not been in India long."

"But you have been to Sunpore?"

"I do not think he was there on that occasion."

"He must have been; he never misses."

"All the same I did not meet him, although I may have seen him."

"Raja is a personage," she said.

"A man of note?" he asked, smiling. "A native chieftain, a mountaineer, a brigand, or what?"

"He is an Englishman, and a planter."

"Raja Ranji does not sound particularly British."

"It is not his real name—at least, I never heard it was," she said.

"An assumed name?"

"Probably."

"For reasons best known to himself?"

"How he came by it I do not know, but I am sure honourably."

"And he owns Black Island?"

"Yes, he is an enthusiast; fond of the sport. He is a great friend of the Rajah of Shirazi."

"Indeed!" he answered in a tone of surprise.

"The Rajah is a big swell."

"Very; Shirazi is a wonderful place, a perfect fairy palace. We went there from Evermore."

"And where is Evermore; enlighten me, please?"

"It is Raja's bungalow, the name of his estate. We remained there after Sunpore; he is most hospitable. Mrs. Margrave was there too; she is a particular friend of yours."

"I know her, and visit there, which reminds me I saw a beautiful native girl with her the other day. Have you seen her? If not, I assure you, she is something worth looking at."

Mrs. Kane laughed as she replied, "Oh yes, I have seen her. So you admire her?"

"I never saw a more beautiful Indian girl. Where did Mrs. Margrave discover her?"

"It was not Geraldine who discovered her."

"No!"

"It was Raja," she said laughing.

"He must be a wonderful man!" he exclaimed.

"In a way he is. Are you interested in the girl? If so, I will tell you all about her."

"One naturally wonders where a girl like that comes from, and how Mrs. Margrave was so fortunate as to secure her services. I presume she is her maid, or companion."

"The latter,—yes, she has been handed over to Geraldine to take care of."

"For whom?"

"Raja."

"You are joking."

"I was never more serious."

"Can't he take care of her?" he asked laughing.

"I suppose Captain Bertram thinks he could, and would be glad of the chance," she replied.

"It might be difficult."

"Her name is Krishna, and she is the daughter of one Abdool, the jamadar at Evermore. He is as ugly as a man well can be; so I need hardly add there is not the slightest resemblance between them. It seems a priest named Paroes, who abides in a temple dedicated to Shiva, cast eyes, other than holy, on the girl, and demanded her of Abdool. He terrified the wretched man into submission, and had it not been for Raja, she would have been handed over to his tender mercies. The girl came to Raja's bungalow, I believe, and implored his protection, or something of that kind; anyhow, she preferred Raja Sahib to Paroes the Brahmin, and I don't blame her."

"Quite a romance," he said.

"That is not all. Raja bade the jamadar bring her to Evermore, and this was done. During our

absence at Shirazi, Paroes, by some means, got hold of her and carried her to the temple. Shirazi, hearing she danced well, asked Raja to bring her to the palace, and he was riding to Evermore for that purpose when he heard cries in the temple. He entered, found the girl in a room, had a struggle with Paroes, who stabbed him in the arm and rescued her. Now you have her history ; interesting, is it not ? ”

“ Very ! But how came she to come to Calcutta with Mrs. Margrave ? ”

“ Raja is to be here for the races, and not wishing to leave her at Evermore he persuaded Geraldine to take charge of her ”

“ So that the naughty Paroes cannot get hold of her ”

“ I suppose so.”

“ You said she dances well, I think.”

“ Divinely. I never saw anything more graceful or bewitching. She is supple and light as a fawn ; her movements are the poetry of motion. The girl might make a fortune on the stage if she wished, or knew how to go about it.”

“ Raja Ranji's a lucky man,” he said.

“ He has persuaded everyone that he takes a fatherly interest in the girl.”

Captain Bertram laughed as he replied—

“ Do you believe that ? ”

“ Hardly ; but Bruce does, and Geraldine.”

“ And you think such a beautiful dancing girl in a bachelor's bungalow does not come under the designation of fatherly ? ”

“ How do you know he is a bachelor ? ” she asked.

"Because a Mrs. Ranji would strongly object to his fatherly interest in such a lovely young girl."

Mrs. Kane laughed as she replied, "He is a bachelor and likely to remain one, unless Geraldine takes pity on him."

"Mrs. Margrave!" he exclaimed. "Are they engaged? No, that is impossible."

"Why? I believe they are very much attached."

"But this dancing girl living with him at his bungalow! It is absurd. She would not tolerate it."

Amy Kane knew Captain Bertram admired Geraldine, and enjoyed teasing him.

"I think it is because she is fond of Raja that she has taken charge of the girl."

"You mean, to keep her out of the way?"

"Not at all; to keep her from Paroës."

"But I never heard of such a thing. Mrs. Margrave would be the last woman in the world to countenance it."

"I am afraid I do not quite understand you," replied Mrs. Kane, who knew very well what he meant.

"If she has taken the girl into her service, she must be under some misapprehension as to the real condition of affairs."

"Not at all. She knows exactly what has been done, and how the girl came to Evermore."

"Then she cannot possibly care for him as you suggest," he said relieved.

"Geraldine has implicit confidence in him. If he told her, as no doubt he has, that Krishna was under his roof merely for protection from the priest,

she could not doubt him for one moment. Even I am more than half inclined to believe him."

"He must be an exceptional man," said Captain Bertram.

"He is," replied Amy Kane with a little sigh.

"Nevertheless, it is rather more than I can accept as gospel," he said. "The girl is too lovely."

"Does it follow because a girl is lovely she must necessarily be bad?"

"I do not mean to suggest anything of the kind, but the temptation to a man in his position is great."

"To some men it would be too great—but not to him."

Captain Bertram was irritated at this constant praising of Raja; it seemed to imply he possessed higher qualities than himself.

"I expect if the truth were known he has hoodwinked you all," he said.

She smiled, and then asked if he would like to meet Krishna.

"I should like to see her dance," he replied.

"That would be difficult, but I will ask Geraldine to let her dance here some evening; then if she consents you will have your opportunity."

CHAPTER XXIII

A VISION OF GOLD

AMY KANE drove a smart turn out. She was up to date in most things, generally ahead of the ladies in obtaining the latest fashions from London or Paris, always well and becomingly dressed. The day after Captain Bertram's visit she called upon Mrs. Margrave.

When an opportunity occurred she broached the subject of Krishna dancing at her house.

"I shall consider it a great favour if you will allow her," she said. "It is somewhat difficult to find new attractions, and people like to be amused and interested."

"Krishna can hardly be considered my property," replied Mrs. Margrave smiling, "and I do not think I should be justified in allowing her to dance."

"You are afraid Raja would object?"

"Not quite that; if I permitted it he would be agreeable."

"Then where is the difficulty?"

"I think the Rajah wishes to see her dance when he is in Calcutta, and perhaps it would be as well for her not to appear in public until he arrives."

Amy Kane laughed as she replied—

"You intend taking care of her. It can do no possible harm for her to come to my house with

you, and if she dances it will be practice for her, not that she needs much, I must confess. Do let her come, Geraldine, there's a dear ! ”

“ Suppose we hear what she says about it,” replied Geraldine.

Krishna came into the room with an easy grace that rather surprised Mrs. Kane.

“ The girl might have been accustomed to society all her life,” she thought.

“ Mrs. Kane wishes you to dance before her guests, Krishna; would you like it ? ” asked Mrs. Margrave.

The girl's eyes expressed pleasure at the prospect.

“ I love to dance,” she said simply

“ There ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Kane, “ you can have no objection now.”

“ Would the Sahib wish me to dance ? ” asked Krishna.

“ If I thought it right he would not object,” said Geraldine.

“ Do you wish it ? ”

“ Say yes, please do,” said Mrs. Kane.

“ When do you propose she shall come ? ”

“ On Friday; that will give me ample time.”

“ You really wish it, Krishna ? ”

“ That is as you please.”

“ Then I think we will arrange for Friday.”

“ Oh, you dear ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Kane.

“ How good of you. When do you expect Raja here ? ”

“ I hardly know; in a few days probably.”

“ And Shirazi ? ”

“ Will no doubt arrive about the same time.”

"I should love to have him as my guest one evening," said Amy.

Mrs. Margrave smiled; this evident desire to shine as a hostess amused her.

"I shall rely upon you to manage it, Geraldine, you are so clever."

Mrs. Kane drove home in a flutter of excitement, and immediately set about writing her invitations. She was busily at work with her correspondence when the Major came in.

"Industrious little woman," he said, noticing the pile of envelopes. "What is in the wind now?"

"We shall have a houseful on Friday evening, don't forget."

This was nothing unusual, so he asked—

"Anything special?"

"Quite a surprise—a sensation I may say. I have persuaded Geraldine to bring Krishna, and she is to dance before our guests."

"Clever little woman," said Bruce, admiringly.

"Who! Krishna?"

"You, my dear; you have a wonderful way of persuading people."

"Geraldine had her doubts about the propriety of granting permission. She was afraid Raja might not like it."

The Major laughed as he said—

"I don't think he would mind anything she did."

"Bruce, do you really believe all he says about the girl?"

"Certainly, my dear; why not?"

"You are a delightful, brave, soldierly innocent,

and I love you; yes, I do—there," and she kissed him.

"Amy, you are very beautiful," he said, stroking her hair gently; there was a hand of iron under his soft touch.

She knew he meant it, a quick glance at the mirror told her he had good grounds for his remarks.

"I sometimes wonder, Bruce, how it is you are so patient to women; they must bore you."

He smiled fondly at her as he replied—

"You never bore me, Amy."

"But our frivolities must seem so commonplace contrasted with the seriousness of your work."

"That is exactly why you are so fascinating; it is such a relief."

"I do not believe a very brave man would ever be discourteous to women," she said.

"The braver a man is, the more tolerant he is of the weakness of others."

"Then you think women weak?"

"In bodily strength, yes; in mind, no; they are more than our equals. I once knew a promising young soldier who was saved by the devotion of his wife."

"Yes," she said, interested; "in what way?"

"He got into a bad set, gambled, drank a good deal, and so on, neglected his duty; on being reprimanded he became worse, but she pulled him up."

"How?"

"Ah, that is beyond me; all I know is she did it, and to-day he is one of the best men we have. He once said to me, 'Major, I owe it all to my wife. If it had not been for her advice and care, I

should have put a bullet into my head long ago.' I asked him the question you have put to me, and his reply was, 'I cannot tell you how she did it, but you see the result.' "

"I am afraid I should be useless in such a crisis."

"You would not; you do not know your power."

"Would you like to see my list ?" she said, handing it to him.

This was the first time she had done so, but he had not noticed the omission.

He glanced down it until he came to Captain Bertram's name.

"A very good selection," he said.

"Do you take exception to any one ?"

"No," he replied ; but the tone was not convincing.

"Bruce, you can make an exception if you will. Who is it ?"

"Well, if you must know—mind you it is of no importance—I am not particularly impressed with Captain Bertram."

"Shall I strike his name out ?"

"By no means; he is in my regiment."

"You do not like him ?"

"Candidly, no."

"He was here yesterday "

"So he informed me."

"He wished to see Krishna dance."

"Is that why you asked Mrs. Margrave to allow her ?"

"Partly; he gave me the idea," she said, smiling.

The Major shrugged his shoulders as he replied—

“He is not a desirable acquaintance for the girl. Keep them apart.”

“I will do my best,” she replied.

The invitations were duly delivered, and on Friday evening there was a gay throng at Major Kane's house.

Krishna caused a sensation, and gratified Mrs. Kane's desire to shine as a successful hostess. She was dressed in pale green with a wavy net over her shoulders, her hair done plainly, with a single jewel flashing in it.

Captain Bertram lost no time in seeking an opportunity to approach Mrs. Margrave; but she did not introduce him to the girl, there was no necessity for it.

The rumour that the beautiful Indian girl was to dance quickly spread, and curiosity was aroused.

Mrs. Kane asked Krishna when she would be ready, and she replied when she desired.

“Come with me, then,” she said, and the girl followed her.

She took her into another room where she changed her dress, putting on the gold Raja had purchased at Sunpore.

When she re-entered the room with Amy Kane there was a murmur of admiration. It was as though a dazzling vision of gold appeared before them. There was no music—none was required.

Krishna at once commenced to dance, and as she did so she forgot her surroundings, forgot everything, except that she was wearing the dress

Raja had given her, and it behoved her to show herself off to the best advantage.

The graceful movements came natural to her; it was a native dance she had seen, and improved upon. Her body swayed, the folds of her dress whirled round enchantingly, her tiny feet seemed alive, hardly touching the floor in their lightness. She swept round and round in a giddy whirl—a mass of golden colour, surmounted by her dark hair. The rapidity of her motions was extraordinary—their gracefulness unquestionable. Seldom had a more seductive figure ever appeared before the admiring gaze of her audience. There was a natural abandon about her that had in it no offence. Her body thrilled with pure enjoyment, as the idea of a fresh movement occurred to her she carried it out perfectly. Everything was new because it was spontaneous—each figure was more graceful than the one preceding. Her dark eyes flashed with excitement; her face was wreathed in a smile of content; her perfect teeth gleamed white against her brown skin.

Geraldine Margrave watched her wonderingly, half afraid of something she could not define.

Amy Kane glancing at Gerard Bertram saw a look of intense surprise and admiration on his face, and smiled.

“He did not expect this,” she thought, and a look at her guests convinced her none of them had anticipated such a scene.

Gliding towards Mrs. Kane, Krishna looked at her, asking with her eyes—asking as plainly as though she had spoken—if she must continue.

Amy Kane smiled encouragingly, and said—
“Please go on if you are not tired.”

Krishna whirled into the centre of the room again, well pleased. Her dress brushed Captain Bertram, and her eyes met his. She smiled at him, seeing his admiration, and his pulses tingled.

“She's a witch—a beautiful witch,” he muttered.
“Lucky beggar that fellow Raja.”

When Krishna ceased and went out of the room with Mrs. Kane, there was a burst of applause and a chorus of approval and wonder.

“By jove, Major, she's wonderful,” said a grim looking old soldier.

“A most extraordinary girl. I saw her dance at Raja's place at Evermore.”

“Raja Ranji—deuced good fellow. Is she his girl?”

“He has handed her over to Mrs. Margrave.”

“She's a treasure, and she is in the right hands,” was the reply.

Krishna threw herself into a chair, panting; the excitement over, she felt faint.

“You danced too long,” said Amy. “I ought not to have allowed it; but you looked as though you wished to go on.”

Mrs. Margrave came in, and seeing how exhausted she was, thought it better she should lie down for an hour.

“What do you think of her?” Mrs. Kane asked Gerard Bertram.

“She is the most wonderful dancer I ever saw. Where is she?”

“Resting; don't you think she deserves it?”

“Where on earth did she learn to dance?”

“She has not learned; it is all natural—music would spoil it.”

“But I never heard of such a thing. I can hardly believe it. Your friend Raja must have picked her up somewhere and taken her to—where is it ?”

“Evermore.”

“Yes.”

“If you require more information about her, ask Mrs. Margrave,” said Mrs. Kane.

This he did, but was not further enlightened.

Krishna changed her dress and went into the garden, where it was cooler.

Captain Bertram caught sight of her through the open window, and unobserved went out.

As he approached Krishna smiled. She recollected his look as she danced.

“You are the best dancer I have seen,” he said.

“It is marvellous. I congratulate you.”

She did not quite understand him, and answered—

“The Sahib thinks I dance well.”

“Who is the Sahib ?”

“Ranji Sahib.”

“Yes, of course; I have heard of him.”

She smiled. It would have seemed strange to her had he not heard of him.

He commenced to pay her compliments, all of which she accepted innocently and naturally.

He could not understand her, either; she was very sly, or remarkably childish.

“Krishna !”

It was Amy Kane calling her, and without looking at him, she ran towards her.

Captain Bertram was puzzled. This girl was something new to him. His experience of dancing girls was very different; they generally sought advances instead of being indifferent to them.

"I cannot make her out at all," he thought. "She's splendid; upon my word she is. Wonder if there's any chance of meeting her. I'll have a try. She's worth it."

Amy Kane had seen Captain Bertram with Krishna, and when she came up said—

"Why did you leave the room?"

"It is so nice here."

"Has Captain Bertram been with you long?"

She looked across the garden towards him and said—

"No, not very long. He is a silly man."

Mrs. Kane laughed heartily and asked why.

"He does not talk like the Sahib."

"Evidently she considers Raja a model of perfection," thought Mrs. Kane.

Mrs. Margrave took charge of Krishna, and they shortly afterwards left.

The dancing of Krishna was soon a general topic of conversation, and Mrs. Kane's guests told their experience to their friends, who in turn talked of it to others, until many people in Calcutta turned to look at her as she drove about with Mrs. Margrave.

A letter came from Raja announcing the date of his arrival in Calcutta. He asked after Krishna, and said nothing more had been seen or heard of Paroes.

"I fear he has gone to Calcutta," he wrote. "Be sure and be on your guard; he is a dangerous

man. An old Fakir who roams about here has informed me Paroes has journeyed to the city ; how he knows I have not ascertained, but I believe him. He hates Paroes, who has done him a great injury, and the vile priest will have a very rough time if he falls into his hands. I am looking forward to seeing you. I have been thinking over our last meeting—have you ? ”

CHAPTER XXIV

PAROES' TRAVELS

WHEN Paroes found himself a prisoner in the room in the temple, and Krishna had escaped, rage possessed him, and for some time mastered him. He crouched down, uttering guttural sounds, clasping his hands convulsively, and swaying his body to and fro.

As he became calmer he thought over some plan of vengeance. It did not trouble him that he was fast in the room; he knew someone would enter the temple and unlock the door.

No one came to his relief during the night, but early next morning he heard movements outside, and shouted. It was the old Moonshee, and his surprise at finding the door locked, and Paroes inside, was great. He asked for the key, and the priest told him to search for it; if he could not find it on the floor of the temple the door must be forced open.

The old man found it near the idol where Raja had thrown it, and unlocking the door let him out. He did not ask for an explanation and Paroes gave none, but plainly indicated he wished to be alone.

When the Moonshee left the temple he made a hurried examination of the idol. It was as he had left it. Somehow he fancied Raja would injure it, and he had spent much toil and trouble in perfecting the mechanism.

During the day he remained in the temple. He had food and satisfied his wants. He knew Krishna was to go to Calcutta, and determined to follow her.

Having had the girl in his possession and lost her made him the more determined to get her into his power again. The man's passion brutally controlled him; everything was subservient to it, and he was incapable of subduing it. The image of the girl was always before him; he saw nothing else, his mind being entirely occupied with her.

There was no reason why he should not go to Calcutta—he would be in no danger. He had no fixed plan as to what he should do when he arrived there; it was sufficient for him that he desired to go. It was a long journey, but he had money and could go by train from the nearest station—many miles away.

Raja Ranji would be in Calcutta—that was another reason why he desired to go—he had friends there who might be useful if his enemy came across his path. Paroes would have killed Raja without compunction, if by doing so it would help him to obtain possession of the girl.

When he left the temple, after securing his money, he walked quietly along until he saw a figure approaching. At first he thought it was one of the villagers, but something in the man's form and face recalled recollections otherwise than pleasant. It was the old Fakir, and Paroes recognised the man he had wronged. He had no desire to meet him, so hurried into the dense tangle of trees until he should have passed. The Fakir went slowly by, and he watched him enter the temple.

"He is seeking me," muttered Paroës.

It was an additional reason why he should leave the place for a time. He knew why the Fakir was here, and had experience of such men when the thirst for vengeance was upon them. It mattered not that he was more than a match for the man—there were many ways of coming upon him unawares—he would always have to be upon his guard. When the Fakir found there was no one in the temple, and learned that the priest had vanished, he would go away and search elsewhere, and it would be safe to return if he wished. He was glad he had escaped observation; it would have been inconvenient at that time to encounter him.

Paroës hurried on, skirting the village and breaking out into the open country beyond. He wished to travel as quickly as possible and leave Evermore behind him.

He was accustomed to walking long distances and arrived at the railway station without mishap. Here he had to wait a long time for a train, and as he had no desire to attract attention he wandered some distance from the open platform, which was level with the road, and seemed almost a part of it. Half starved, almost wholly naked, natives were squatting about; shrunken children with old faces like monkeys lay at full length on the hard ground, women near them caring very little about their offspring. There were no trees; it was a bare, uninviting spot. The station—or shed—had been pitched here because it was handy to many villages.

Paroës heeded the sights and sounds but little. He was absorbed in himself; his thoughts were company, and not cheerful, to judge by his face.

This man was a compound of superstition, vices of the lowest kind, utterly selfish, given to lying, and without a redeeming good quality to leaven the mass of iniquity. He had received some education in his young days, but it had done him more harm than good. He had a smattering of many things—a grasp of none. He hated mankind, was miserable and discontented with his lot, loved cruelty, abandoned himself to all lusts the flesh is heir to. He was by no means isolated in this; unfortunately, there were many of his kind in the land. They were banded together in an unholy brotherhood, assisted at terrible rites, ministered to their unlawful appetites, and cloaked their diabolical deeds under a garb of priestliness. If there is a place in the bottomless pit for such men they will undoubtedly find it. Utter annihilation is too good for them; prolonged torture throughout the ages should be their portion.

Paroës stood alone; the poor creatures huddling about shuffled away from him. Something warned their dull witted minds he was uncleaner than themselves. He noticed the action and showed his teeth like an angry cur ready to bite.

There was a shriek dimly heard in the distance—it was the whistle of the engine—and Paroës walked towards the station. The passengers waiting were few, the onlookers many, and they were hustled unceremoniously out of the way. One human being of rags and bones stretched out a withered arm and skeleton-like hand to Paroës, clamouring for money. The priest struck the hand and the wretch howled with pain. A volley of curses was hurled at Paroës, who replied by knock-

ing him down ; he kicked him and left him on the ground.

The weather was hot, the sun poured down upon the station roof, the water bags moved not at all, there was not a breath of air. Paroes drank and filled a bottle he had with him.

The engine steamed into the station ; its sides seemed to glare with heat. It puffed and snorted, cast up white volumes of steam, hissed with pent up fury at the fiery furnace inside and the broiling sun out. The engine driver and stoker were frizzled up like chips, but their work had to be done, no matter how hellish the heat.

The carriage doors were flung open and several people dropped out, their parched lips cracking, their eyes staring wildly. They rushed at the water bags and drank like camels satisfying themselves for a ten days' march in the desert. There was a Babel of sound—languages were mixed in utter confusion. Men spoke in strange tongues endeavouring to bring understanding by furious gesticulation ; it made a British soldier who was standing by perspire to look at them.

The solitary representative of a gigantic army seemed out of place, dropped into the canvas to fill in the picture, a big smudge on a brown, shimmering, quivering background. He watched the dirty, meagrely clad folk gathered about him for a few minutes, and then addressed himself to his surroundings in the choicest language he could conjure up ; it harmonised well with the intense heat. He said the something country was jolly well basted—roasted, and it was like being fried in something something fat. Finding his vitupera-

tions made him hotter he hurled half a dozen applicants for water out of his path, and gulped down the contents of the bag, chokingly muttering that the blamed water was half boiled and scalded his throat.

The carriages were well filled. Paroes walked along the line looking for a seat. The train commenced to move and he scrambled into a compartment, being received with abusive epithets. He crushed himself down between two Jews, and they had to give way. The train bumped on its journey through awful heat and fearful dust. Paroes tried to sleep but his Jew companions determined otherwise. They jabbered across him, behind, in front, shouted over his nodding head, leaned bodily upon him, giving him no peace. He had come between them and must take the consequences.

For some time Paroes bore it in silence; becoming emboldened by his quiet demeanour they trespassed further upon him. He waited his opportunity, and when their heads were at a convenient distance he banged them together. There was a sound as of two rams butting, and then the injured parties rubbed their heads violently. Recovering from the shock, by mutual agreement they sat upon Paroes. They shook him violently, but not for long. He caught the Israelites by the neck in a strong grip, one in each hand, and banged them together until they fell upon the floor. Being in a handy position for kicking, the occupants of the carriages made it rather uncomfortable for them. Struggling to their feet the Jews glared round them. The train swung round a curve and they were hurled upon Paroes. He flung them on to the

man opposite, and he in turn pushed them on to his next neighbour. They were thrust about from one end of the carriage to the other at the imminent risk of the doors flying open and depositing them upon the line. All this time the sun poured down with unabated vigour, and the place became an inferno. How long the disturbance continued no one remembered, but when the train stopped the Jews were ejected from the compartment. There was no station, and as they scrambled on to the train again, they disappeared into the next carriage.

Paroës thought of his bottle of water and drank. Eager eyes were upon him, so he took his time, deliberately watching them, and drained it to the last drop. The waterless men looked ready to tear him in pieces, but he had proved he was not a man to be trifled with, and there was no desire for another eruption; the atmosphere was already volcanic, more than satisfying.

Through the night the train went on; when there was no sun there were other things too numerous to mention. Groaning, panting, jerking, the engine tugged and pulled them along. When Calcutta was reached Paroës felt more thankful than he had ever been in his life; as usual, in his thankfulness he was selfish. He went out of the station and walked like a man who knew his way about and whither he was bound.

No one noticed him—there were too many thousands of his kind—he was an atom in the great throng. This he knew and liked; it suited his purpose, and when that purpose be evil the less known of it the better. He glanced neither to the

right or the left, but hurried on until he came to a more squalid part of the city.

Here he commenced to look about him, and realising where he was, glanced at the buildings. Further down the street he entered an open door and was greeted by an evil looking Hindoo, who grinned him a welcome. There were sounds of revelry in the rear of the eating place, and Paroes hinted he would go to a private room.

The dirty, greasy looking object led the way, and when they were alone asked the reason of the unexpected visit.

Paroes, needless to say, did not enlighten him, but he hinted that there might be work to do and he might require help.

In this den he remained resting all day, nearly twenty-four hours. His limbs ached, he was consumed with a feverish desire to see the girl who had been the cause of his coming. He pictured what he could do if he had her in his power in the room with him; all his imagination could conjure up did not satisfy him one iota. His lust for her had given place to grim, deadly, cruel hate—he was dangerous. He could have tortured her without remorse. He roused himself to a state of fanaticism in which he came to believe he was an instrument of vengeance. The girl had not flouted him merely; she had defied that black, glaring, hideous image that was his god. A frenzy possessed him. He glared and foamed like a madman, he shrieked in his fury, and the man who had welcomed him entered the room. At the sight of him Paroes calmed down, and his body shook with excess of feeling.

Shortly afterwards he went out. There were lights in the streets, and he wandered about until he came to the outskirts of the city. Tired out he returned to his lodging. Next day he was out early, before the heat became unbearable. He looked at every carriage and every woman. Standing behind an arched doorway he saw Krishna with Geraldine Margrave. The carriage stopped nearly opposite to him and Mrs. Margrave got out leaving the girl alone.

Paroës fixed his eyes upon her. His face twitched, his hands clasped and unclasped. His mad frenzy seemed to be returning, and he clutched a keen blade hidden in the fold of his dress. Then Mrs. Margrave came out of the shop, entered the carriage, and drove away.

Paroës followed swiftly, keeping it in sight. He dodged and ran, avoiding being knocked down in a marvellous manner. The carriage stopped twice; this gave him time to make up his ground. Eventually, he saw Krishna enter Mrs. Margrave's house and he was satisfied.

CHAPTER XXV

RAJA'S OPINION

CALCUTTA was the meeting place of sportsmen from all parts of India at this time of the year—the Viceroy's Cup being the great attraction. Horses had been purchased in England, France and Australia, with a view to winning, and the partisans of each country were eager to back their opinions and their fancies with their money. The race promised to be of unusual interest; there was keen rivalry between several mighty potentates and rich merchants. His Highness of Shirazi was popular; his colours were always heartily greeted on a race-course. He spent his wealth with a lavish hand—left no stone unturned to win the coveted trophy. His Luck had deserted him in this race; year after year he had been within an ace of snatching the prize, and it eluded his grasp in the most tantalising way. With Raja Ranji it was the same, and when he had a horse he thought could win it, he handed over his chance to the Marajah.

Destiny had been Raja Ranji's racer; he was so no longer, and men who knew him wondered why he had sold a horse that stood every chance of winning. They knew it was a sacrifice on his part, and concluded the Rajah must have used powerful persuasion to induce him to forego his ambition. The horses for the great race were all on the spot;

the Rajah had arrived from Shirazi, and was eagerly questioned as to the prospects of Akbar and Destiny. He made no secret of his partiality for Akbar, and his friends followed his lead and backed it. James Hythe was in an enviable position as trainer of the favourite, for Akbar soon figured in that proud position. He became a person of importance and his bearing was one of condescension.

Colin Warbeck was much sought after, and his particular friend, Captain Bertram, was taken into his confidence. From the Rajah's secretary he learned all about Raja, and heard the exaggerated grievances against him. Krishna was spoken of in terms that left no doubt in the Captain's mind that her favours were purchasable, and he concluded her innocent manner on the night of Mrs. Kane's reception was assumed. He had very little to live on besides his pay, and a win over Akbar would be very acceptable. He never gave a thought to the Rajah's second string, Destiny; a passing allusion to the horse had been disdainfully received by Colin Warbeck.

The Signal, an English bred horse, owned by the Hon. A. A. Apcar, and Swiftsure, bred in the same country, owned by the Kour Saheb of Patiala. Dr Wilton, the owner of St. Honore, a French horse, was very sweet upon his chance, and there was a promise of ten or a dozen runners.

Raja lost no time in calling upon Mrs. Margrave, where he found Krishna looking very happy and pleased with her new life. The girl welcomed him with signs of devotion that touched Geraldine. She understood that Krishna's love for Raja was

something capable of great self-sacrifice. She was sure if Raja was happy the girl would be contented —her every thought was of him.

Since his conversation at Evermore with Geraldine, Raja had made up his mind to tell her who he was, and how he came to be addressed as Raja Ranji. It was all very simple; there was nothing to be concealed.

She was heartily glad to see him again and showed it in her greeting. She loved him; the faint shadow of doubt on the question had left her, and she was proud of her affection for him. She had some experience of men and Raja ranked high in her esteem. During the years she had known him he had always been the same: a reserved, just, simple hearted man; not given to flattery, or seeking for acknowledgment of his merits. It was to Raja she looked for help when her husband died, and he attended to the various melancholy details in a sympathetic way that earned her gratitude. Thoughtfulness for others was one of his strong points, and in the midst of so much that was selfish she appreciated it to the full.

There was an understanding between them, although no words had been spoken, and each seemed to feel that in the future their lives would be linked together.

Since Krishna had been alone with her, Geraldine Margrave began to love the girl, and felt that in doing so she could analyse Raja's feelings towards her.

Raja's time was fully occupied, and he had some cause for anxiety in the condition of Destiny. Since the horse arrived in Calcutta he had been off

his feed—a most unusual thing. The long journey evidently upset him, and there was not much time for him to pull round. Raja tempted the horse with various appetising morsels, and gradually he became more settled.

The Rajah was aware of Destiny's condition, and it naturally encouraged him in the belief that Akbar would beat him. His sympathies were with Raja, whom he liked, and he knew the trouble and anxiety he had over his charge.

It was at Major Kane's Raja met Captain Bertram, and at once formed an unfavourable opinion of him. Mrs. Kane's remark that he was a victim to Krishna's charms did not enhance the opinion already formed.

Geraldine Margrave told him about Krishna dancing at the Kane's, and he was pleased at the girl's success. In answer to her question he replied that he saw no objection to it, and that it gave the girl pleasure and also many people besides.

"Mrs. Kane is very anxious to get the Rajah to attend one of her receptions," said Geraldine, smiling. "She is desirous of shining socially."

"He has promised to pay you a visit," replied Raja, "and then Krishna can dance before him."

"Amy will be terribly jealous."

"Why? It is only natural he should see her dance here."

"Cannot you persuade him to visit the Kane's?"

"That is easily arranged. He is very good natured; besides, he admires her."

Mrs. Kane was particularly attentive to Raja

during his visit, and surmising the cause it amused him.

"Krishna created quite a sensation," she said.
"It was very good of Geraldine to bring her."

"And equally kind of you to invite her."

"I am afraid I was rather selfish. You see I wanted her to amuse my guests."

"Which she did?"

"In the best possible way. I never saw people so fascinated before; it was wonderful."

Major Kane joined them, and said—

"I hear Destiny is not in very good form. I am sorry."

"He certainly was 'off' for a few days, but he's all right now," replied Raja.

"I hope I shall be lucky again," said Amy.
"I think I must speculate on Destiny."

"The Rajah will tell you to back Akbar," replied Raja.

"If I have the pleasure of meeting him. I wish he would come here. Do you think he would if I invited him?"

"Certainly."

Major Kane was amused at his wife's manœuvring, and said—

"Enlist Raja's aid and then there will be no doubt about it."

She gave him a grateful smile for suggesting what she hardly knew how to ask.

"I shall be very pleased to do what I can," said Raja; "but I assure you he will not be difficult to persuade; my task will be light."

Captain Bertram was desirous of ascertaining from Raja what his opinion was about the Cup

race. After a preliminary skirmish he asked him about Akbar's chance.

"I think he is entitled to the position he holds in the betting," replied Raja cautiously.

"You have Destiny in hand, and ought to have a good idea of their respective merits."

"I have," replied Raja quietly

"And you think Akbar the better horse?"

"His Highness is of that opinion."

"Warbeck informs me that Akbar is a good thing for the race. I think I shall plunge on him."

"Plunging is a dangerous game."

"Risky, certainly, but this is an exceptional case."

"Quite," replied Raja, who thought it might be very exceptional indeed after the race.

"Warbeck tells me Akbar beat Destiny badly in a trial."

"That is correct."

"You saw the gallop, of course?"

"Naturally; it took place at Evermore."

"And you were satisfied with the result?"

Raja thought him impertinent, but it was quite in keeping with the opinion he had formed of him.

"The trial was perfectly genuine and Akbar won," he said.

Captain Bertram had not gained much by his cross questioning, on the contrary he was rather uneasy; he thought Raja was concealing something. Supposing after all Destiny turned out the winner, and he was on Akbar?

He spoke to Colin Warbeck again and related the gist of his conversation with Raja.

"He gave me the impression that he could say more if it suited him," he said.

"He's very anxious to beat Akbar because he has an unreasonable antipathy to myself and Hythe."

"Not an easy man to get on with I should think?" said Captain Bertram.

"He's a bear," was the reply. "I cannot understand what the Rajah sees in him. He allows him liberties and he makes the most of them. He got a regular facer when Akbar beat Destiny in the trial; he suggested it because he thought his horse would win. It was a sell for him, I assure you."

"Are you quite certain it was a genuine trial? Destiny may have had a lot of weight up."

"Oh, it was straight enough. He dare not play tricks with the Rajah."

"Then you would be surprised if Destiny beat Akbar?"

"Very much indeed."

A couple of days before the races Raja was closeted with the Rajah.

"I must impress upon your Highness," he said, "that I think Destiny will run a great race, and I should not be surprised in the least if he beat Akbar. I am telling you this because I wish you to have a clear understanding."

"They both run in the Trial Stakes," said the Rajah. "We shall be able to judge better of the two then; it will be a fine public trial."

"Granted," replied Raja; "but even if Destiny is beaten I still think he may turn the tables in the Cup. The gallop will do him good, and the extra three-quarters of a mile will be in his favour."

" You are prejudiced," said the Rajah somewhat testily. " You do not want Akbar to win."

" So long as your Highness wins the Cup I shall be satisfied," replied Raja quietly. " I wish you to thoroughly understand I fancy Destiny has a good chance. Why not support them both ? "

" If Akbar beats Destiny in the Trial Stakes, there will be no doubt about the result of the Cup so far as they are concerned."

" The Trial Stakes is a mile only; the Cup a mile and three-quarters. I think your Highness will acknowledge Destiny is the better stayer."

" That may be correct; anyway, I hope my colours will be successful this time."

" So do I with all my heart. Both horses will be ridden out, of course ? "

" Yes, such is my intention, and may the better one win."

Raja felt he would be heartily glad when the big race was over. He knew how readily men attributed dishonest motives to trainers of horses, and if Destiny lost the Stakes and won the Cup, many disagreeable things might be said. He had not much hope of winning the Trial Stakes, the distance was not far enough, but the mile and three-quarters of the Cup would just suit Destiny.

After bustling about during the greater portion of the day, he was glad to find rest and quiet at Geraldine Margrave's.

He told her his anxiety about the result of the two races, and how anxious he was that the Rajah should be satisfied.

" Something tells me Destiny will win the Cup,"

he said, "and if Akbar is beaten there will be trouble somewhere."

"But you have told him your opinion of the horses," she said.

"Yes; but he still thinks Akbar the better of the pair, and I acknowledge he has every reason to form such an opinion. I almost wish I had refused to sell him the horse."

"Whatever happens he will be only too pleased to see either of them successful."

Raja walked to his hotel pondering over the coming events. He did not notice Paroes slinking along some distance behind. The priest was constantly prowling around Mrs. Margrave's house, and did it in such a way as not to attract attention. He constantly puzzled his brains to devise some means of injuring his rival, as he considered Raja. It was difficult to form a plan that would be successful and avoid detection. Men disappeared frequently, but not such well known persons as Raja Ranji. Paroes was aware that at this particular time the planter's name was on many tongues, and that a hue and cry would be raised if harm came to him.

As he followed him the inclination was strong upon him to glide swiftly upon him and stab him. He kept in check, knowing there would be no hope of escape. He feasted his eyes upon Raja, hatred glowing in them; it afforded him satisfaction to dog his footsteps. He knew where Raja stopped, took cognisance of his daily movements; but this only convinced him that to harm him was well nigh impossible.

With Krishna it was the same. There was no

means of coming at her; she was safely guarded. He saw her frequently, and each time added fuel to the fire that consumed him.

His long journey to Calcutta had every prospect of being a failure, and it was at Evermore he must again seek an opportunity to get her into his power. He wished he had not left the temple, but the thought of the old Fakir reconciled him to his present position. He feared the man because he had done him a great wrong.

Raja, unaware that he had been followed, entered his hotel, and after lingering about the place for a time Paroes sought his lodgings.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE TRIAL STAKES

THREE races had been decided and the Trial Stakes was the next on the card. It was the opening day of the Calcutta Meeting, and everyone worth knowing was on the course. Visitors from England, as they gazed upon the scene glowing with colour, hardly realised that it was Christmas Eve, and mentally contrasted the vastly different pictures in the two countries. London was probably hidden under a mantle of dull leaden skies, the piercing wind whirling down the streets; shivering, poverty stricken people huddling together for warmth, whilst on Calcutta Course all was merriment and sunshine—a blaze of Eastern splendour.

The result of the Cup to a great extent depended upon the Trial Stakes, and Akbar was a very hot favourite, being backed as though the race was over. The Rajah's handsome horse was thoroughly trained, and Destiny looked quite mean as they were led round together. Captain Bertram expressed the opinion to Major Kane that if looks went for anything, Destiny had very little chance of success.

Bruce Kane knew Raja's opinion and respected it. He meant to back Akbar for the Trial Stakes and Destiny for the Cup, and induced several of his brother officers to follow his lead.

Destiny looked small, but a clever judge, recently arrived from Sydney, was very favourably impressed by him. He liked Akbar, but said Destiny was, he should think, the better stayer.

Ten horses faced the starter, and Akbar was a hot favourite on the totalisation. The Rajah felt confident, and spoke encouraging words to Ben Aysha as he went out. He smilingly remarked to Fred Ferney that he did not think Destiny would win.

Raja was not at all anxious about the result; he was pretty certain Akbar would win, and gave instructions to Ferney not to persevere with his mount if he found he had no chance.

The Signal, Swiftsure, and St. Honore were running; the only Cup horse likely to be formidable that was an absentee, being Leichardt, "a Waler" from Sydney.

The horses were quickly despatched and it was a hollow race. When they had gone half a mile Ben Aysha sent Akbar to the front, and the favourite carried the Rajah's colours to victory without an effort. Desiny finished in third place behind The Signal, but never looked dangerous.

A great cutburst of cheering greeted the winner, and Akbar's success in the Viceroy's Cup was regarded as a foregone conclusion.

Colin Warbeck and James Hythe were jubilant, and the latter said it was any odds on Akbar landing the big race. Captain Bertram had won money and determined to win more on Cup day.

Raja was not at all cast down or despondent at Destiny's defeat, and this puzzled the opposition. James Hythe could not understand it, and said to him—

" You take it coolly, upon my word. I suppose you have lost all hope of winning the Cup ? "

" I did not expect Destiny to beat Akbar over a mile," he replied.

" He has no more chance over the Cup distance than he had to-day," retorted Hythe.

" That remains to be seen."

" It would be an extraordinary reversal of form if Destiny won the Cup."

" I do not see it. The distance is almost double."

" There would be a scene if he beat Akbar."

" What do you mean ? "

" Such a sudden change of form would be considered peculiar."

" Not to a good judge of racing," said Raja.

" I consider myself a fair judge, and I confess I should not be able to understand it."

" You mean that if Destiny won you would not be satisfied with his running in the Stakes ? "

" Exactly."

" Then I am afraid you will have to be dissatisfied, for I shall not try to enlighten you."

The Rajah was exceedingly pleased at Akbar's success; it confirmed his good opinion of the horse, and he had no doubt he would win the Cup.

Raja consulted Fred Ferney, who said candidly Destiny never had a chance of catching Akbar, but added that it would be very different in the Cup.

The Evermore stable boys were in a quandary. The money raised from the Moonshee had been judiciously invested on Akbar for the Stakes, but opinions were equally divided as to which horse should carry their rupees in the Cup. Half a

dozen of them, headed by Hasan, were in Calcutta with Destiny and the other horses from Evermore, including Kyban, and the day following the races they were eagerly discussing the big event on the morrow.

Hasan was out in the town and they had the stables to themselves. Their argument became heated, and as no decision was arrived at, the money was eventually divided, each one to back his own fancy. There was no dispute as to the money to be invested for the boys remaining behind at Evermore; they had decided to pin their faith on Destiny no matter what happened.

It was seldom any of the boys ventured to address the Sahib, but when he came round to see Destiny at night one little fellow, bolder than the rest, saluted him respectfully and stood his ground. He was a round faced, merry looking boy, and Raja smiled at him, wondering what he wished to say. His companions looked on aghast, fully expecting the Sahib to catch him by the neck and shake him. Much to their astonishment he did nothing of the kind, but smiled and asked in a quiet voice what he wanted.

Bursting with importance the boy could hardly speak, but he managed to splutter out that he wished to know if Destiny would win the Cup.

Raja laughed outright as he said—

“Would you like him to win?”

“Yes, Sahib; we have a few rupees to back him with.”

“You have, eh!” smiled Raja. “Well, I think you can put them on Destiny; he will run very well.”

No sooner had Raja left the stables than the lads crowded round the audacious boy and expressed their high appreciation of his bravery. He had actually asked the Sahib for a tip and had been given Destiny. There was no longer any hesitation; they were of one mind now, and agreed all the money must be invested on the Sahib's selection. Such was their faith in him that they never doubted Destiny must win; the Sahib had said it, that was sufficient.

Raja was amused at the incident and wondered if the boys often made wagers; probably they did, with what little money they had to spare.

The Rajah was expecting him when he arrived, anxious to hear his final opinion after Akbar's easy win. He stated exactly what he thought, and spoke so convincingly that he was impressed, and thought that perhaps after all Destiny might win.

"I assure your Highness," said Raja, "he will run much better than in the Stakes; you must not take too much notice of that performance. When I sold you the horse I was fully persuaded he would win this race, and I may say he has been trained to the hour. He will be in perfect condition to-morrow, fitter than ever he has been; it only needed the fast gallop yesterday to thoroughly wind him up. I allowed for that. You have won one race with Akbar, and it is now Destiny's turn."

The Rajah smiled. He was quite satisfied with Akbar's performance, and had changed his mind in regard to the Cup; he seemed to wish Destiny would win.

Colin Warbeck had been almost too jubilant over Akbar's victory; the Rajah thought he showed

too much animosity against Raja and resented it. He had no desire to have the praises of Hythe sung daily ; the note became monotonous. His secretary was not exactly the man to please him, although he had a high opinion of his capabilities for his office.

He rather liked the idea of Raja being in a position to triumph over them, and prove that he knew more about horses than James Hythe.

Although Akbar had won the Trial Stakes easily the rumour got abroad that Destiny was likely to improve considerably upon his running in that race. There was a large gathering at the Rajah's headquarters on Christmas Day, and it was here that the gossip originated. Racing was almost the sole topic of conversation, as only men were present, and many private wagers were laid in the course of the evening.

Raja, who was amongst the guests, had no reasons for keeping his opinion to himself. After Akbar's performance Bruce Kane's brother officers felt their confidence in Destiny shaken, but the Major stood firm and said he relied implicitly on Raja's judgment, which was that Akbar would win the Stakes and Destiny the Cup.

"The first prediction came off ; I see no reason why the second should not be successful," said Major Kane.

Captain Bertram said it would be an extraordinary thing if Destiny beat the favourite ; such an event would not enhance the Rajah's popularity.

"No one will cast a doubt upon Shirazi's honesty, no matter what happens," replied Bruce Kane sharply. "He is above suspicion. I advise you to keep such opinions to yourself."

Captain Bertram had won a considerable sum over Akbar, and urged on by Colin Warbeck he tried to draw Raja into making a wager.

"Still of the same opinion?" he asked him, "or has Akbar's race induced you to change your mind?"

"Did I express an opinion to you?" asked Raja.

"I understood from your remarks you fancied Destiny for the Cup."

"And you favour Akbar's chance?"

"Most decidedly."

"And you will win your money," said Colin Warbeck.

"Do you ever bet?" Raja asked the secretary, who had spoken with no intention of drawing an otter from him to make a wager.

"Sometimes," he replied.

"If you care to have a friendly wager I'll bet you a thousand rupees Destiny beats Akbar."

This was a very favourable offer, considering the difference in their price in the quotations.

Colin Warbeck saw good hedging in this offer and accepted it, saying with a laugh—

"That bet was all in my favour."

"I wish I had such an offer," said Captain Bertram.

"You can have a similar wager if you wish, or make it more if you like," said Raja.

This was a chance too good to be lost, so he replied—

"Say two thousand rupees Akbar beats Destiny."

"I am agreeable," replied Raja.

"You are not getting fair odds," remarked Major Kane.

"I prefer to bet level on this occasion," replied Raja.

Captain Bertram went to his club; and before he arrived at his quarters had invested more money than he could afford to lose on Akbar.

Cup Day opened brilliantly, and there was an immense gathering on the course—sportsmen from all parts of India being present. The enclosures were crowded with a brilliant throng, the ladies in their smartest frocks of many gay colours adding brilliancy to the scene.

Geraldine Margrave came with the Kanes, and she brought Krishna, who was amazed at the wonderful scene. Many inquiries were made about her, and when it became known she was the dancer who had created such a sensation, there was a general desire to see her. She was innocently unaware she was a centre of attraction, which gave her an additional charm.

As Geraldine looked at her she smiled at the thought that Krishna was old Abdool's daughter. There was some mystery about her birth, she felt sure, but the probability was it would never be solved.

"This is rather different to Evermore," said Mrs. Margrave.

"Yes," replied Krishna; then with a little sigh, "but I love Evermore."

"You wish to return?"

"When it pleases you."

"We must ask the Sahib," she said. She did not care to call him Raja to the girl.

“ Shall I return with him ? ”

“ I do not know ; we shall see , ” replied Geraldine .

Raja found them out before the races , and although his time was fully occupied he remained with them as long as possible .

Mrs. Kane persuaded the Major to put her money on Destiny , and she was eagerly anxious to see that horse victorious . Krishna understood Raja wished one particular horse to win , and thought what he desired he must surely have . She knew nothing at all about racing , but Raja explained to her that the name of the horse was Destiny , and that Mrs. Margrave could point him out to her when he came on the track .

The Rajah’s pair , Akbar and Destiny , naturally attracted the most attention , and James Hythe was eagerly anxious to express his opinion that the former would win easily . Ben Aysha was equally confident and did not for a moment dream of defeat . Over-confidence on the part of a jockey sometimes leads to disastrous results . Ben was a well known figure on Calcutta Course , having ridden many races in the Shirazi colours . He was better known than Fred Ferney , who stood talking to Raja not far away from James Hythe and Aysha . Both jockeys wore the peacock blue and crimson jacket , and contrary to expectation , there was no distinguishing cap — both being gold .

Raja was giving Ferney good advice , telling him not to lose his head and to be sure and keep Destiny well in hand until they had gone a mile .

“ I fancy Aysha will go to the front too soon , ” said Raja . “ The race in the Trial Stakes will

have given him confidence, and as Akbar made most of the running then he will think he can do it again. Destiny is trained to the hour; he can be made no better; and in the last three-quarters of a mile you can send him along as hard as he can gallop. Don't be afraid about his not staying it out, he will run as straight as a barrel to the end. Do as I tell you, Fred, and I'll make you a present of a thousand rupees if he wins; and I am quite sure His Highness will come down handsomely."

"I'll do my best," replied Fred, "and I want to beat Ben; he's been very cocky since he won the Stakes. He told me Destiny might as well be at Evermore for all the chance he had."

"And what did you say?"

"I was a bit ruffled at his chaff, and said it would take Hythe all his time to get Akbar off the Course after the gruelling I'd give him on Destiny. We've got a bet on of a hundred rupees, and I hope I'll win it."

"Keep a cool head and ride your best and you will win," said Raja.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE VICEROY'S CUP

“THAT is Destiny, the Sahib’s horse,” said Mrs. Margrave, pointing him out to Krishna, as he galloped up the course, and she looked eagerly at the brilliant colours.

“He has to beat all the others?” she asked.

“Yes, and I hope he will.”

“If the Sahib says he will beat them it must be true.”

“Horses do not always win when expected,” replied Mrs. Margrave, smiling.

“Why not, the Sahib knows which is the best. Abdool says he never makes a mistake about them.”

“I hope Abdool’s opinion will prove correct.”

“There is another horse, and the rider has the same colours,” said Krishna.

“That is Akbar, he is also the property of the Rajah.”

Krishna was unable to understand why Akbar was running if Destiny was going to win, it seemed a useless proceeding.

There was very little delay at the post, and when the dozen runners were off they were almost in line. The first to break and show a bold front was Nadir, who soon placed half a dozen lengths

between himself and the rest of the field. There was not much danger to be apprehended from this quarter, and very little notice was taken of him.

Akbar was one of the hottest favourites ever known for the Cup, and on his recent form he looked a real good thing. The Rajah's pair were together, just behind The Signal, Swiftsure, and Bombay. It soon became evident that Ben Aysha had no intention of riding a waiting race, he had unbounded confidence in his mount, and thought Akbar would win the Cup as easily as he had the Stakes. For this he was not to blame, as James Hythe impressed upon him that the horse would stay the full course. At the end of five furlongs Akbar was only a couple of lengths behind Nadir, and more than that distance in front of the remainder. When Raja saw this move on Aysha's part he smiled, it was exactly what he had expected. Fred Ferney thought of what Raja had said, and it raised his hopes. The pace was a clincher and Akbar quickly wrested the lead from Nadir. The Rajah's gay colours were leading and backers of the favourite thought the race would be a repetition of the Trial Stakes.

Captain Bertram was jubilant, if Akbar won his gains would be large.

At the end of the mile Destiny was lying sixth, but going well, and Raja, closely watching the race, was perfectly satisfied.

Fred Ferney at this point commenced to make up his ground, and Destiny's pace improved gradually and surely. The Signal and Swiftsure were running well, and the French horse, St. Honore, had come onto the scene. Very few people took much notice of Destiny, Akbar was the Shirazi

favourite, and the other was not likely to win. Krishna had wondered why Akbar ran, other people thought Destiny might have been reserved for an easier task.

Ben Aysha felt triumphant as Akbar dashed along in great style, his sweeping even strides covering a lot of ground. It would be a feather in his cap if he won, and he meant doing his best. Riding a race in front of the field requires an uncommon amount of skill and judgment, and although Ben Aysha possessed both qualities he was hardly the equal of Fred Ferney.

At the end of the tenth furlong the many supporters of the favourite saw with some uneasiness that the gap between Akbar and the other horses had perceptibly diminished, Destiny was now level with The Signal and going very strong, his jockey having him well in hand, enjoying, to all appearances, a comfortable ride.

Raja, a keen judge of a race, saw his jockey was riding with judgment, and became sanguine of success.

Destiny was not carrying his colours, but if the horse won the triumph would be his, for he had trained him and watched him for many months with a view to this race.

As they drew nearer to the winning post, Ben Aysha thought the race as good as over, he did not expect to be headed and congratulated himself on his easy ride. A rapid glance behind convinced him he had very little to fear, he was still some lengths to the good, and Akbar was going as well as ever. This was perfectly correct, but it was also true that Akbar was galloping at top speed, and if

anything got alongside him he could not increase his pace.

Swiftsure passed Nadir and Bombay, and in another moment Destiny had left The Signal behind and was gaining on the leaders. The Rajah, surrounded by his friends, saw Ferney's move, and said—

“I think I have a good chance of being first and second.”

“Which is the second?” asked Major Kane, cheerfully, he was in excellent spirits, for Destiny was running exactly as Raja had predicted.

“Akbar will not be caught,” replied the Rajah.

“I am not so sure about that,” replied the Major.

Harry Lavaux, who had been looking for Raja, caught sight of him, and running up said, hastily—

“Will Destiny get up? Dan Brenton has just offered me four to one against him.”

“Snap it up,” replied Raja, and Harry disappeared again and secured the odds. No sooner had he done so than the bookmaker said—

“You've got the best of me there, Mr. Lavaux, but I hope he wins, I have a bad book against Akbar.”

Destiny was now fighting it out with Swiftsure, and the pair raced neck and neck. The “Waler” had plenty of pace and was a good stayer, he hailed from a land where horses are taught how to race and where the trainers are not afraid of giving them plenty of work. The Kour Saheb of Patiala was very sanguine of winning, and not without good reason.

Fred Ferney shook Destiny up and in the next hundred yards he got his head in front of Swiftsure. Inch by inch he drew away, but the "Waler" stuck to his work doggedly, and would not be shaken off.

Ben Aysha was riding Akbar confidently, the winning post was not far off, and victory seemed secure. He meant to take a rise out of Fred Ferney when it was all over, and Raja Ranji would not be quite so obstinate in his opinions in future. Ben's dream of victory was rudely shattered. He heard a horse galloping dangerously close behind him and wondered what it was. There was no time to look round, and Akbar must be roused up. He proceeded to ride his mount and found, to his dismay, that the horse's pace did not improve. Was it possible Akbar could gallop no faster? This unpleasant truth was forced upon him and he became desperate. He still held a lead, a great advantage at this point, but could he retain it to the end? Thud, thud, thud, came the hoofs behind him, very unpleasant they sounded, but he could not draw away from the noise. He saw there was much excitement on the stands, and wondered if there really was a possible chance of losing. A horse's head appeared alongside him, he rode furiously, but there it remained, not to be shaken off. The head drew level with him, and he caught sight of the colours and the rider, the horse was Destiny. Ben lost his head, became wild with rage and mortification; Destiny of all horses he least wished or expected to see there. He raised his whip and Akbar felt it stinging his flanks, he was doing his best, had been for some time, and

resented it. The shouting and tumult was deafening, the famous Shirazi colours were battling the finish out almost level, the white jacket of Swiftsure's rider hovering close behind. They were still a couple of hundred yards from the winning post, there was ample time for the unexpected to happen, and the Indian sportsmen knew a "Waler" was never done with until the post was passed. Ben Aysha seemed to be "all over" his mount, and it was not difficult to understand that he had lost control over himself. His temper was none of the best at any time, and the sudden appearance of Destiny had quite upset him.

Fred Ferney, on the contrary, was as cool as possible, he had time to notice Ben's twitching face and pitied him. He had the measure of Akbar and the road to victory was easy. As he glanced at Ben their eyes met, and there was a savage look in the darkey's face. Before Fred realised what Aysha's intention was Akbar rolled on to Destiny and knocked him out of his stride. Fred had not the slightest doubt this was intentional interference, and naturally resented it. He pulled Destiny together, but the momentary slackening of his speed had given Swiftsure's jockey a chance he speedily took advantage of. With daring skill he shot the "Waler" up on the inside, the move giving him the lead.

This was an unexpected shock to the Rajah, who looked at the struggling horses with a near approach to consternation. He saw it was Aysha's fault, but thought Akbar must be beaten, and that he was unable to hold him together. It was most unfortunate, was victory again to be snatched from his

grasp. His luck was indeed bad. Several times his horses had gained places in the Cup race, and now there was every appearance of their running second and third. It was very tantalising, and Major Kane sympathised with him.

Raja did not often use strong language, but when he saw Akbar knock Destiny out of his stride at such a critical moment, he vented his annoyance in a volley of reproach at Ben Aysha.

"I'll wring the black devil's neck," he growled. "He can't win, and he means to prevent Destiny beating him."

To tell the truth this was not exactly what Ben manœuvred for. He was not aware that Swiftsure was so close up or he might have hesitated. When he saw the "Waler" come up on the inside he realised the consequence of his ill timed action, and it frightened him. He knew the Rajah's power and feared him. If Swiftsure won there would be trouble, and his position would be precarious. This curbed his temper and he pulled himself together, he must prevent the "Waler" winning, no matter what happened. He tried to pull Akbar on to Swiftsure, but the latter was too far ahead, and the attempt failed.

Loud shouts greeted the Waler as he appeared in front and the blundering finish was most disappointing. Destiny, however, had plenty left in him, and with great presence of mind Ferney kept him in hand. It was a desperate situation, but he meant to snatch the race out of the fire if possible. The Rajah saw the gallant little horse leap forward with a bound and reach Swiftsure's quarters. His hopes rose high, he might win after all. Half a

dozen more strides and the peacock blue jacket was almost level with the rider of Swiftsure.

“What a finish !”

This was the unuttered thought of thousands as breathlessly they watched the great battle. It was a mighty struggle and the result hung in the balance, it was a case of the last stride, just getting up in time on the post.

Krishna now realised what it was to watch a close finish for a great race. Her face betrayed her excitement, her body quivered, her hands were clasped nervously together.

Mrs. Margrave felt her hand upon her arm, the grip was tight, and she looked at her, then glanced again at the horses.

Colin Warbeck and Capt. Bertram were calling down dire calamities on Ben Aysha. They considered he had lost the race, for there was no chance of Akbar winning. James Hythe, ever ready to throw the blame on to someone other than himself, was of the same opinion, and Ben must suffer for his bad riding. He wished Swiftsure would beat Destiny, he cared not for the Rajah's feelings, he was desirous his opponent should not reap the fruits of victory.

Destiny drew level with Swiftsure, and amidst a scene of unparalleled excitement fought the race out to a finish. The “Waler” was at last beaten, the bad luck of His Highness of Shirazi had changed, and the peacock, crimson, and gold jacket was carried to the fore in the Viceroy's Cup.

Destiny had won, just won, it could not well have been a tighter finish, and a mighty cheer greeted the Rajah's victory. There was general delight, for

the owner of Destiny was popular, which is not always the case with great men.

It was a glorious win and Raja was proud of his success. He knew how hardly the victory had been gained, and that an attempt had been made to defeat Destiny which was decidedly unfair. Having won he could afford to be magnanimous, and in answer to Fred Ferney's complaint, said—

“Say nothing about it; you won, and that is sufficient. Ben will be sorry for what he has done when his disappointment is over.”

“He was mad with rage, I don't think he knew what he was doing,” said Fred.

“Then he is to be pitied,” replied Raja. “All the same it was not his fault Swiftsure did not win. You rode a very fine race, and I shall not fail to tell the Rajah what I think of it.”

There was much jubilation in the Shirazi camp over Destiny's victory, but Colin Warbeck discreetly kept in the background. Captain Bertram bemoaned his bad luck, he had lost a large sum, and was thoroughly convinced that Akbar would have won had he been properly ridden. Raja was to drive back with Geraldine Margrave and Krishna, and joined them when he had seen Destiny was safe, and in charge of the all important Hasan, who fully realised the value of the victory.

There was one gloomy figure on the course. Paroes was present, but had taken no interest in the race. He was in a state in which he was dangerous to others. His chance of gaining possession of Krishna was hopeless, and he had worked himself into a frenzy bordering on madness against Raja, the man who had thwarted his evil desires. There

was murder in his heart as he stood gazing at the brilliant throng with dull heavy eyes. He was certain Krishna was on the course, and also Raja. He pushed his way through the people and looked at the occupants of the carriages, seeking the man and the girl on whom he was intent on wreaking his wicked revenge ; in what way he knew not, he must wait his opportunity.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE VICTIM

HIS Highness of Shirazi was jubilant over his victory, and Destiny's win enhanced his already high opinion of Raja's judgment. He was in a generous mood, and everyone who contributed in any way to the success of his colours he determined to suitably reward. He left the matter entirely in Raja's hands, knowing he would deal fairly by all. During the racing he had seen Mrs. Margrave and also Krishna, and she had promised the girl should dance whenever he thought fit to see her.

After the Cup race preparations were made for the return home, and Mrs. Margrave's carriage was in readiness. They waited for Raja, who at the last moment had been called away to attend the Rajah.

Paroës, eagerly searching every face, had at last discovered Geraldine Margrave's carriage, and the sight of Krishna at her side was too much for him. He sought for an opportunity to come at her, but feared the fury of the crowd if he injured her. She looked happy and lovely as she sat in the carriage, little dreaming that danger was at hand.

The priest saw Raja come to the side of the carriage and pressed forward ; he went away again, brushing past Paroës as he walked, but not seeing him.

It was an easy matter for Paroës to remain unseen in the crowd, and he lurked about in a savage mood,

fingering the sharp Indian blade hidden in his dress.

People were streaming away from the course, all was bustle, noise, and excitement. Raja, having ascertained Shirazi's wishes, hurried back to the carriage. Paroes saw him and dogged his footsteps, not knowing what might happen in his favour.

Krishna smiled as he came up, and for a moment Raja paused to look round before entering the carriage. As he took his seat opposite to them Paroes rushed up. A bright blade gleamed in the light, Krishna gave a cry of fear and stood up. It had been Paroes' intention to strike Raja as he sat, but the girl's sudden action disconcerted him. She bent forward as though to protect Raja, and before anyone fully realised what had happened Paroes drove the blade into her bosom and, leaving it, fled, and was lost in the crowd. The action was so swift that he had time to disappear before a hue and cry was raised. Raja had not seen him as Krishna stood between them, but he clasped her in his arms as she sank back with the cruel blade buried in her breast.

“Paroes,” gasped Krishna, and became insensible.

A crowd quickly gathered, and the news spread with lightning-like rapidity that a murder had been committed, a ghastly crime. Major Kane, driving past, saw the press round Mrs. Margrave's carriage, and halted. Learning what had happened he rushed away for a doctor, and fortunately found one.

Dr. Spey looked grave, and said he had better drive home with them, and attend to Krishna at Mrs. Margrave's.

This was the best thing to be done under the circumstances, and the carriage drove slowly away, followed by the murmurs of a sympathetic crowd.

The tragedy caused a sensation, and hundreds of people discussed it on their way home. The Rajah heard of it, and sent a special messenger to Mrs. Margrave's to make inquiries.

The mystery was heightened by the total disappearance of the girl's assailant, he seemed to have vanished by magic, no trace of him, apparently, could be found. Who was the man, and why had he done this thing ? Was it through jealousy, had Ranji Sahib taken the girl from him ? People who knew him scouted the idea.

Raja held Krishna in his arms and his heart was heavy with grief. Mrs. Margrave watched the insensible girl, her face expressing horror and sympathy ; from time to time she asked Dr. Spey if the wound was mortal. He shook his head gravely, he could not tell until he had withdrawn the blade and made an examination, he feared when this was done she might bleed to death.

Geraldine saw Raja's drawn features and knew what he suffered. A short time before he had been triumphant at Destiny's victory, now he was cast down into the depths of despair. He commenced to realise the position : Krishna had saved him from death, for the blow was probably aimed at him. She lay dying in his arms, her young life cut short, her love for him had been the cause of her undoing. Around them was the hurrying traffic of the course, merry faces, joyous laughter, everything gay and festive ; the contrast was painful, he felt it keenly. He did not speak, but watched Krishna's face for a

sign of returning animation. His arms ached, but he felt it not, his whole being was wrapped up in the girl, if she died he thought the world would be changed.

They arrived home, and he carried her tenderly into the house. Dr. Spey suggested he should retire, but he refused. He watched the cruel blade drawn from her young breast, and saw the blood gush forth, it made him turn pale, but he did not waver, he meant to see it through and learn the worst.

In the next room sat Geraldine Margrave, her things still on, waiting in an agony of suspense. Was this to be the end of the bright light hearted girl who loved her Sahib better than her life. She pictured her dancing at Evermore and at Mrs. Kane's, her body glowing with health, her whole being thrilling with delight in her movements, and now she was stricken down. It seemed unjust, cruel, and she resented it. No thought of what the girl was to Raja, or he to her, crossed her mind. She would have willingly given up all hope of winning him have handed him cheerfully over to Krishna, if by so doing she could save her life. At the slightest sound she started ; her nerves were unstrung, the terrible suddenness of the scene had shocked her.

They were in her room a long time, presently Raja came out and beckoned her, she went forward without questioning.

Krishna lay on the bed, her eyes open, her senses recovered, and the wound had been bound carefully.

But there was no hope for Krishna, the bright

young life was ebbing away with every breath, the wound was mortal, the stab had gone home. Paroes was revenged indeed.

Dr. Spey told Raja all, and the planter stood beside her so stricken with grief that he could not speak.

Krishna's eyes were fixed upon his face, and she smiled up at him. She did not know she was dying, she felt very little pain. This was the great trouble ; they dare not tell her the truth.

Dr. Spey said it was better to let things take their course. She tried to speak, but the blood from her lungs welled up into her throat and almost stifled her. When she saw Geraldine she held out her arms, and Mrs. Margrave bent over and kissed her. A grateful look came into the girl's eyes, she had never known a mother's tender care, such love as is bestowed upon children had been absent in her life, and that kiss was like a precious jewel, a pearl of great price, it brought solace, peace, rest to her soul, and she sighed happily.

She must die, the fiat had gone forth, the angel of death formed an unseen figure in the group. Her days of life were counted, her breaths numbered, the moments fixed and written in the great book, there could not be a single day's respite, nay, barely an hour. Her look wandered from Geraldine to Raja, and in it there was the old dumb, loving submission to the will of the Sahib, which was her law, her all. It hurt him ; why did she look at him like that ? Had he always been the Sahib, never the friend, perhaps the lover ? He recalled the first time when he kissed her at Evermore, how she clung to him, nestled at his side without a doubt or a

fear, trusting him with that perfect, grand single-hearted faith which pure love brings.

It was too much for him, he raised his clenched hand—

“By God she shall not——” the word died before it was uttered, she must not know, she must go to the glorious paradise not knowing whither she was bound. What would the awakening be? Surely for such as she a home of everlasting peace, where ages would fly like hours, where suns shone that never set, where palaces more glorious a thousand times than Shirazi would be her abiding place.

Her breath came slowly, she closed her eyes, and their faces paled.

She was not gone, the summons was delayed for a brief time.

Again she looked at Raja, and her eyes said—

“Come to me.”

He crushed down the feelings, which almost stifled him, and bent over her. She kissed him again and again.

“I am glad, Paroes meant it for you,” she whispered.

“I wish to God he had reached me and spared her,” he thought.

“You will send him away from Evermore?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“I am glad, then it will be safe.”

“He shall die,” said Raja.

“It is what he deserves. When do we go to Evermore?”

How could he answer her, tell her she would never see Evermore again, that in a few hours, perhaps

less, she would go on a long journey alone. She became anxious because he did not reply.

“ You will take me back to Evermore ? ” she said.

He promised her; dead or alive, she should go back to Evermore.

This satisfied her, and again she closed her eyes.

Dr. Spey remained, but he discreetly left the room, there was something here he hardly understood.

Side by side Geraldine and Raja watched Krishna's life ebbing away. It was painful, a terrible strain, but they bore it bravely for her sake, she saw no sign from them that her end was at hand.

A change came over her. She realised something was about to happen, and which was beyond her.

“ What is it, Krishna ? ” asked Mrs. Margarve.

“ Someone called me, the voice was very far away.”

“ No one called, dear, we are here with you.”

Krishna smiled, she had heard the voice, what it said to her she alone knew, but it made her happy.

“ The Sahib has been very good to me. I love him.”

It was Geraldine heard her words, and she answered—

“ And he loves you, Krishna.”

“ I am glad I saved him. You are glad too ; he loves you also.”

“ Yes, I am glad ; but I am sorry for you, dear.”

“ I shall soon be well.”

“ Yes, you—— ” she broke down and cried, burying her face in the bed.

Raja placed his hand on her shoulder, and said kindly—

“Perhaps you had better rest, Geraldine ; I will remain, it is too much for you.”

Dr. Spey noiselessly entered the room, a glance at Krishna told him the time was at hand.

“I will remain,” said Geraldine.

Raja took her hand, and they stood side by side waiting for the coming of the end.

Krishna slept, and a beautiful look stole over her face. A gleam of hope came to Raja, she might possibly recover.

An hour passed, then Raja touched her cheek, her forehead, bending over her he listened ; there was no sound of breathing. He could not believe she was gone. A few hours before she was all life and animation, a beautiful girl, a butterfly gliding gloriously happy through the world, her existence being a delight to herself and others.

As he turned round Geraldine put her hands on his shoulders, and looked into his face.

“She was very dear to us, Raja,” she said.

He knew she understood him, felt as he felt, and that Krishna’s death had brought them closer together. Raja had promised to take her to Evermore, and he was true to his word.

Krishna was laid to rest in a quiet spot, the burial place which Raja had set apart for such as cared to be laid in the earth.

Then he set about finding Paroes, for he intended taking summary justice upon him with his own hands.

In the first place he went to the Fakir who still wandered about the temple grove. From him he

learned that the priest had not returned, and he had therefore to wait until his opportunity came.

It was highly improbable that Paroes would venture back to Evermore, he would have to seek him in Calcutta, where it was difficult to find such men.

Abdool was distracted at the loss of his daughter, and his grief was pitiable while it lasted, but he soon forgot her and she became to him as though she had never been.

Raja missed Krishna sadly, the bungalow seemed dull without her, and the more he thought over her sad fate the more was he incensed against Paroes.

It seemed strange the priest had so utterly disappeared, but his action was swift and sure, and in the confusion of the moment he seized his opportunity to escape.

Search had been made for him in every direction ; Raja furnishing the police with an accurate description of him, and offering a large reward as an inducement for his capture.

Raja returned to Calcutta, he wished to see Geraldine Margrave, and she was ready and willing to listen to him.

He had not much to explain, it was a commonplace story of but little interest except to themselves. His real name was Richard Ranger, and by some means it had been corrupted by the natives, when he came to Evermore, into Raja Ranji ; and it stuck to him, as such names will. He told her of his family, how his wandering disposition had separated him from them at an early age, and although he had heard from his father since he had been in India he had never felt any inclination to

return home. He was not a favourite son, and his life at home had not been particularly happy.

This was all, there was no mystery, but such as it was he thought she ought to know it before he asked her to be his wife.

Geraldine did not hesitate in accepting him, but made one condition, that he must not give up Evermore.

“I am sure I shall be very happy there,” she said, “and I do not care for society ; with you, Raja, I shall be quite contented.”

CHAPTER XXIX

THE END OF A VILLAIN

PAROES plunged into the crowd when he had given the death blow to Krishna, and was hidden in the jostling mass of people. Everything favoured his escape, his attack was sudden, and before the people standing near the carriage realised what had happened he was gone.

He had not intended to kill Krishna, the blow had been aimed at Raja, but her swift movement had unnerved him and he struck home almost before he was aware of it.

At first he hardly understood what he had done, but gradually his crime came home to him and he felt he had made a mistake. He had lost the girl and placed his life in danger, at the same time Raja, his enemy, was safe. Sorrow for killing Krishna he had none, but he raged against her self-sacrifice which deprived him of all hope of securing her. His journey had been a failure, and ended in danger ; it might be death.

Raja lived, and that thought urged him to escape. Krishna had suffered, so must he, and to wreak his vengeance on him it was necessary to escape. He hurried away, avoiding the town, steering out into the country. For several days he tramped on, resting and soliciting alms when he felt inclined.

He found many to give him food and drink; there was, he knew, small danger of one of his caste starving. He had money, but this he required for the railway journey.

As he walked along he pondered over the situation and eventually decided to return to the temple at Evermore. Raja had not seen him, of that he felt certain, and probably Krishna received a death blow and had not spoken. He would risk it; the girl had seen him, but his blade sealed her lips.

If questioned he could deny he had left Evermore; it would be hard to prove he had been in Calcutta. He caught the train, alighting at a station some distance from Evermore, walking the remainder of the way.

As he neared the temple a terrific storm burst over the land, the thunder rolled, the lightning flashed, the rain descended in torrents. He crept for shelter into a cave in the rocks and listened to the fury of the storm. He was superstitious and the discordant elements made him fearful, they seemed to rage in angry protest at his return, and his crime.

He crouched down in the cave and the lightning searched him out, playing round his hiding place, blazing in his face, licking the walls of the cavern. The peals of thunder shook the earth, the wind rose, and twisted branches from the trees with mighty strength; they cracked as they fell crashing onto the ground.

Terror stricken, he hid away in the farthest corner of the cave where it was dark, but he beat a hasty retreat, when he saw two glaring eyes peering at him, and heard a hissing sound. His dread of

snakes was greater than that of the storm, and he left the cave. Everything was dripping wet, the thunder had ceased, and the wind moaned as it went down. The lightning still played about the trees and he shut his eyes when its dazzling brilliancy almost blinded him. He staggered on, hoping to reach the temple, where he felt he would be safe. The form of the trees and the lay of the land became familiar and he recognised where he was.

Down the grove he hurried, stumbling over fallen branches and hurting his limbs. He thought he was alone, there would be no one about in such weather. He gained the wall surrounding the temple, staggered to the door and entered. A hurried glance showed him the place was as he had left it. There was the grinning black idol with its grinding knives hidden in the huge black body. The secret was his own, no man could use those terrible weapons but himself, he had fashioned the springs and the works and perfected the fearful instrument of death. Had he used it? That question he alone could answer, but there were stains on the blades which told tales, dull dark blots on the steel which he had been unable to cleanse away.

He was tired and weary, his eyes heavy for want of sleep, and entering the room he sank down on the mat where he had struggled with Krishna. In a few minutes he slept and his deep breathing told of his worn out condition.

Paroës had not returned unobserved. As he entered the grove the old Fakir saw him and raising his hands cursed him and uttered vows of vengeance. The wild weird creature was elated with savage joy

as he saw Paroës stumble helplessly along, his strength spent, his body weak. This was the time to act, before Ranji Sahib stepped in and robbed him of his prey

During Paroës' absence the Fakir had not been idle. Curiosity prompted him to enter the temple and once inside he examined everything it contained. Before he turned Fakir he had been a mechanic and his inspection of the idol disclosed to him its hidden springs. He soon found out the terrible secret ; the knives were set in motion and twirled and whirled with a horrible grating sound. This hideous god of torture fascinated him and he wondered how many victims had satiated its cruel lust for blood. He promised it one more if he had an opportunity. He knew Paroës would return and waited patiently, the coming of the storm warned him something wicked was astir. It seemed to him fitting that the priest should return in such weather, it harmonised with the blackness of his deeds.

When Paroës entered the temple the Fakir waited some time and then cautiously followed. He had no desire to disturb him, he meant to come upon him unawares, he had no compunction in taking any advantage of him that might offer, fair or unfair. Paroës could have crushed him, killed him easily ; the Fakir knew this and had no desire to die, it was not part of his scheme.

With the stealthiness of a panther stalking its prey he entered the temple, then stood listening. At first he heard no sound, but his ears were sharp, and in a short time he detected the dull monotonous breathing of a heavy sleeper. At this welcome sound his sunken eyes sparkled, and his hands were

raised in supplication. Noiselessly he moved down the temple until he reached the door of the priest's room, it was ajar, and he looked in.

Paroës lay on his back in a deep sleep and the Fakir's eyes fastened upon him with a hungry look. A strong cord hung on the wall, he carefully took it down, making no sound. Quickly tying a noose at one end and another in the middle, he crept towards the sleeper.

With a sudden spring he leapt on to Paroës, passed the noose over his head and drew it tightly round his throat, then before the struggling priest was half awake he put the other loop over his feet, slipped the long end of the cord through it and drew Paroës together in the shape of a hoop, his head almost touching his feet, then bound his hands. It was impossible for the priest to struggle, he was half strangled, and his head seemed on the point of bursting.

The Fakir tied the rope fast and squatting down contemplated his enemy. Although the loop round his neck was tight it was not sufficient to strangle him, but the more he tried to free his feet the greater became the pressure on his throat, and he had to desist. At first Paroës did not recognise his assailant, but when he realised in whose power he was every vestige of courage forsook him and he gave himself up for lost.

The Fakir sat grinning at him, and from time to time jerked the cord, causing him great pain. Paroës made desperate efforts to free himself and rolled about the floor in his frantic struggles. He could hardly breathe and blood commenced to issue from his mouth and nostrils. His tormentor did not

speak, but gloated over him in silence. An hour passed, which seemed to Paroes an eternity, and then the Fakir went out of the room.

This gave him a gleam of hope, if he retained his senses he might possibly get free, or in time someone would find him and liberate him.

A sound in the temple caused him to listen keenly. He heard a grating noise close to the room.

Then the wretched man realised what the Fakir was about, and a gurgling cry came from his throat. His enemy had discovered the secret of the idol, he had penetrated its hidden mystery, learned the use of those terrible knives. A whirring sound made him shudder and this time his efforts to free himself were frantic. He bit at the cord until his mouth bled, he tugged with his feet until he was almost strangled and his eyes started from their sockets. It was all to no purpose, he sank down exhausted, yet his brain was alive to the fearful danger he was in.

The whirring noise stopped and the Fakir came in, again sitting down beside him. He commenced to recount to Paroes past scenes in his life, omitting no details, making the worst of every act he had committed.

“The time for vengeance is here,” said the Fakir. “Your doom is sealed, at last I am satisfied.”

He caught hold of Paroes, dragging him towards the idol. The terrified priest saw the iron door was open, the knives exposed, and his senses left him. This was not what the Fakir wished, so he waited until he recovered, in the meantime loosening the cord round his neck and binding his arms to his sides.

Gradually Paroes recovered, and his terror redoubled until he was well nigh mad.

The Fakir seized him, and with a strength born of hate heaved him through the opening into the idol. Shriek after shriek came from the wretched man, but the Fakir laughed and shut the door. He touched the spring and there was a fearful sound of crushing and grinding, but no more cries.

The Fakir was busily engaged for some hours after the knives had done their work. It was a gruesome task he laboured at, but he seemed to enjoy it. Later on he might have been seen carrying something in a large bundle which he dropped down the old well near the temple.

Next day there was nothing to indicate the knives had been used, the Fakir had done his work well.

He left the temple and sought the Moonshee. They talked together for some time and the Fakir asked him to write a letter to Ranji Sahib. He waited for him to speak and he said—

“ Write : From the old Fakir to the burra Sahib, who wishes him all happiness. Paroes has returned. I have met him and he has gone away. Do not seek him, you will never find him. He is punished and is no more.”

The Moonshee looked at him.

“ What have you done ? ” he asked.

“ God is great, He has given me strength and I am content.”

“ Where is Paroes ? ”

“ He is no more.”

“ You have killed him ? ”

The Fakir made no answer to this question.

“ Send the letter to the Sahib,” he said.

"He is away He is not here."

"When he returns, send it."

"Where are you going ?"

"Far away ; my work is done," said the Fakir.

He offered the Moonshee money, which he refused and said—

"I will say nothing, Paroes was a wicked man."

"It is good," answered the Fakir, and walked slowly away.

When Raja returned to Evermore, he received the Fakir's letter, which puzzled him. He at once made search for the man, but could not find him. Nor did he ever discover his remains.

He examined the temple, but found no trace of Paroes. He had no doubt the Fakir had come upon him unawares and killed him, but he never discovered the horrible nature of his death. There were signs of the struggle in the room, and marks of blood upon the floor, which convinced Raja that the Fakir had probably killed Paroes as he slept.

It was from Abdool he at last got some inkling as to what had happened. The jamadar had heard cries in the temple and seen the Fakir come out of the building. He was too terrified to enter himself and had never been near the place since.

Raja had other matters of importance to occupy his mind. He was busily preparing Evermore for the reception of Geraldine. When the Rajah heard of the engagement, he sent for Raja to the palace, and much to the surprise of the planter insisted upon presenting him with some of the finest furniture of Indian workmanship his clever carpenters had made. He also gave him splendid carpets and rugs, skins and trophies, and to crown

all a magnificent set of rubies, diamonds, and pearls for Geraldine. The price of these gems Raja knew must be great, they were beautiful beyond compare, and he hardly dared accept them. This was not all, he handed over Destiny to Raja and half a lakh of rupees in addition to the full price of the horse.

It was a magnificent action, worthy of one of India's greatest princes, and made with such a courteous manner that Raja felt it would ill become him to refuse his benefactor anything. When he spoke of the value of the jewels, the Rajah said—

“ I have many precious gems and it gives me pleasure to hand them to you for your wife, she is a woman to be proud of, worth winning, and I wish you every happiness. Tell her from me that she will always be a welcome guest at Shirazi, and that I am very glad she is coming to Evermore.”

CHAPTER XXX

EVERMORE

THE marriage of Geraldine and Raja was a quiet ceremony ; it took place in Calcutta and shortly after they arrived at Evermore.

Geraldine was surprised and delighted at the appearance of the Bungalow, it had undergone a complete transformation, the Rajah's gifts were costly and the bachelor's quarters had disappeared. Her boudoir was resplendent with gems of Indian art, it was a perfect woman's paradise, everywhere she saw signs of Raja's care and thought for her comfort. He had anticipated her every want, and his observation of her home life must have been thorough and used to advantage.

The peculiar quiet surrounding of Evermore was restful, and she felt very happy. She entered into the life of the place, took an interest in her home and in his work.

The Ryots looked with wondering eyes at the beautiful lady who had come to dwell in their midst. To them she appeared like a goddess descended upon earth, and their awe of her was amusing. She visited the villages where the primitive habits of the people, their monotonous mode of life, their scanty fair and strange apathetic

natures somewhat puzzled her. She wished to introduce reforms, make their lives brighter, but soon found this was impossible. Their habits had been bred in them for generations, they wished for no change, were contented to live their weary lives as they listed.

Raja was amused at her efforts but did not attempt to dissuade her, he knew she would quickly discover it was hopeless to try and change their customs. The naked children played about her, touching her dress wonderingly, looking at her face with big dark curious eyes.

Abdool's efforts to please her would have been ludicrous had he not been so desperately earnest. Old Lisa became less sullen under her gentle sway, the cheeky stable lads were respectful in her presence, Hasan hurried to do the honours of the stables whenever he saw her approaching. It was a life of ease and contentment and Raja was devoted to her.

She commenced to ride again, and went long journeys with Raja. They pierced dingy green forests where the crimson flower of the cotton tree bloomed and the bronze coloured foliage of the sunput towered above like a copper beech. The wood of the sal trees was fine and hard, the leaves broad and glistening in the spring, they were tipped with reddish bronze, which gradually toning down gave the peculiar dark green tinge which denotes the sal forest. There were white blossoms and red blossoms and trees of various kinds innumerable.

By the banks of the stream they went past gorgeous plants, lovely ferns, flowers of almost every hue, but scentless, a wondrous sight, glowing with

colour, fairy-like in its strange beauty. Raja told her that when the mists rose the deadly vapours of the night stole forth breeding death and disease, a fatal miasma which was as dangerous to the sleeper as a bed in the snow.

There were many birds gorgeous in plumage as became the land, but almost songless. Green parrots screamed overhead, the golden mango bird and the red tufted bulbul twittered faintly, trying to sing and failing. The honeysucker flitted about, dainty as an orchid, drinking honey from every flower like the bee. The butterflies had wings of rainbow lines, they resembled jewels dancing in the sunlight, the hum of insect life was in the air, an oppressive silence reigned throughout the vast trees and the dense tangled undergrowth.

A large red and green parrot with a crimson beak peered at them from the branches of a tall tree close by, it was another with a body of dazzling green, red wings, yellow beak and black throat, with a vivid red topknot, a bright blue tail, under which were feathers of purest white.

A great black fishhawk sat on a bough overhanging a creek, there was also the dark ibis, and the paddy bird, a crane, and here and there a heron. The shell gatherer with a big black body and white wings was busily engaged in catching snails for a succulent meal. These sights charmed her unaccustomed eyes, and Raja, who was a close observer of Nature, explained many things to her.

They travelled into the jungles, where the inhabitants were a peculiar race, the women with fair skins wearing a loose flowing garment like the skirt of a gown which twisted tightly round the body above

the bosom left the neck and arms bare. Silver rings adorned their ears, noses, toes and arms, and many of them were curiously tattooed. There were poisonous snakes, hidden like devils in a paradise, cunning, swift and deadly.

Geraldine revelled in such scenes of forest and jungle, there was always something new, fresh discoveries were made daily. She was horrified at the cruelty of the natives to animals, the thin bony bullocks were goaded to desperation with a sharp pointed stick, the ponies had legs twisted and bent almost out of all shape. Torture seemed part of the nature of these beings and they took pleasure in inflicting it. The Hindu may venerate the sacred bull, but he is a fiend with beasts of burden.

Geraldine endeavoured to put a stop to this round Evermore, and succeeded fairly well ; bribery went a long way to ameliorate their lot.

To the palace of Shirazi they paid frequent visits, were always welcome, and met many friends there.

Major and Mrs. Kane, Harry Lavaux and his wife, once Mabel Hayson, visited Evermore and were surprised at the change wrought in the bungalow Amy Kane sighed as she looked at the beautiful jewels presented by the Rajah and thought Geraldine a very lucky woman to possess them.

Bruce Kane was delighted at Raja's good fortune, there was no man in India he had a higher opinion of than his host. He accompanied him shooting and when he rode round his estate, being much interested in the process the indigo passed through before it was ready for the market.

Once the Major spoke of Krishna, and a gloomy look came into Raja's face.

"Did you ever find that murderous priest?" he asked.

"No, but he met his fate. An old fakir he had wronged killed him, how I do not know, but probably in some horrible way commensurate with his deserts," replied Raja.

"It was a fiendish crime."

"I shall never forget it," said Raja. "Krishna was very dear to me, Major, you can have no idea of her loving trustful nature. She would have been a great companion for Geraldine."

Bruce Kane thought that perhaps it was as well Krishna had no opportunity for such companionship, he did not mistrust Raja, but Geraldine might not have regarded his affection for the girl with much favour.

The stables at Evermore contained many good horses, and Raja meant to try and win the Viceroy's Cup on his own account.

For this purpose he had purchased an Australian horse called Musketeer, a beautiful bay, that had won the Sydney Cup, and several other big races. Two thousand pounds was Musketeer's price in Sydney, and he looked worth it.

"It will not be this year he will win it," said Raja, "but I hope to have him as fit as Destiny was in the course of another twelve months."

"What a race that was," said the Major. "I shall always remember it. I wonder how Colin Warbeck took his defeat. Captain Bertram had to sell out, he was deeply in debt over the race."

"Warbeck has left Shirazi, I rather fancy the Rajah had had enough of him, and I do not wonder at it. Hythe is still there and will do better now he

is alone, he was led astray by the other man ; he is not a bad fellow at heart."

" And are you contented here ? " Amy Kane asked Geraldine. " It must be rather lonely for you sometimes."

" I am very happy," she replied. " And I love Evermore. You have no idea how attached I am to the place even in such a short time. Raja is so good to me, he is so kind and considerate and I assure you he has taught me to study Nature in all her moods as I have never done before."

Amy Kane wondered if it would last or whether the enchantment would wear off. She would have been bored to death at Evermore, even with such a model husband as Raja, but then she was very differently constituted to her friend.

Harry Lavaux and his wife resided at Birdsville, and were often driving to Evermore. By following Raja's advice he had done well and was making money. Mabel had every reason to be satisfied with her lot. The Sunpore week was the event of the year, and the camps of Raja and Harry Lavaux were pitched side by side. Here they indulged in friendly rivalry in the races, and neither begrudged the other a victory.

Geraldine often thought of Krishna and the sad end, sometimes spoke of her to Raja, but the subject always made him melancholy and she avoided it as much as possible. It was mainly owing to Krishna she had discovered her love for Raja to be stronger than she had imagined. The girl's innocent words awakened her to the extent her happiness depended upon him. Her suggestion that she should live at Evermore came to her as a revelation, showed her

this was the one thing she desired. She felt very tender towards the dead girl, and often visited the spot where she was buried.

There was not, however, much room for sadness in her life, and each day brought its duties and its pleasures.

Then came the time when she discovered something that made her almost tremble with joy and thankfulness. It made her very tender towards Raja, and opened his eyes to the wonderful charm she possessed for him.

When the boy was born he took it in his arms from old Lisa, and gazed into the little face and blue eyes that opened for the first time in the wonderful world. His heart throbbed with the pride and joy of a father holding his firstborn in his arms. He was a mature man and his feelings were thereby intensified. The small atom of humanity was wonderfully fascinating to him, he stole into the room and watched the child as it slept, touched its soft arm as it lay on the coverlet, wondered if he ever looked like that, and smiled at the idea.

Geraldine too was wrapped up in the child. It was her first experience of the delights of motherhood, and she, like Raja, was at an age when such a gift becomes the more precious.

His Highness of Shirazi sent the child a most wonderful cradle, it was wrought in delicate work of gold and studded with gems, a princely gift indeed, a fortune surrounded the child as he slept in it all unconscious of the value of his resting place. There was much feasting at Evermore, when the child was born, and the villagers were made happy in the way best suited to them.

This new tie bound them faster to Evermore, and Geraldine was always sorry to leave it even for a brief visit to Calcutta.

Raja, however, insisted that she must have a change sometimes, and as he accompanied her she raised no objections. It was always with a feeling of relief she returned home and commenced her daily round of life.

When the great drought came, and famine swept down upon the land, it was then the natives at Evermore found out what it was to have a good master. In many parts of the country the people died off like flies, and their withered bodies covered the ground. Thousands of pounds collected in London for their relief was a mere drop in the ocean of want and starvation. The poor creatures merely laid down and died, it was their fate, and they succumbed to it without an effort.

Raja had a hard time of it at Evermore, but he was not daunted by the woeful misery all round him. He fought it bravely, and at great cost saved thousands of lives.

Food was distributed in the villages, it was difficult to obtain and given sparingly, but there was sufficient to keep body and soul together.

The Rajah with Raja's help, did much, but over the vast tract of country and the teeming multitudes he ruled there was much unavoidable mortality. Then the rain came and the land sprang into life again, and in a year all was forgotten, the myriad dead lay still, the living races to work once more.

Musketeer won the Viceroy's Cup two years after Raja purchased him, and there was another excuse for festivities at Evermore.

Although it became widely known that it was Richard Ranger who was the successful owner of Evermore, he was still always called in the district Raja Ranji, and this was the name which Geraldine loved best.

THE END.

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